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DEADWOOD DICK SENTENCED; or, The Terrible Vendetta.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "DENVER DOLL" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.



A FLYING LEAP CARRIED HIM OVER THE HEADS OF THE CROWD, AND DEADWOOD DICK WAS OUT OF THE SALOON, IN THE DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT, Ere A HAND COULD BE RAISED TO PREVENT HIS MARVELOUS ESCAPE.

Deadwood Dick Sentenced; OR, The Terrible Vendetta.

A Nevada Tale.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK," "DENVER
DOLL," "SIERRA SAM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

HANGING DAY IN NOWHERE.

A NEVADA morning paper, *The Stuff*, had the following editorial, which did its editor proud, as an illustration that he could "get thar," when material was plenty, and occasion required him to "throw" himself.

"A GREAT EVENT

IN CAMP NOWHERE, TO-DAY!

"A NOTED DESPERADO TO BE EXECUTED!

"Deadwood Dick's Last Act!"

"To-day, which promises much for many, ushers in, to one man, in our young city, a prospect, which to say the least, is not very appetizing. We speak of the condemned assassin and road-agent, Edward Harris, better known by the famous sobriquet of 'Deadwood Dick.'

"At one o'clock, P. M., Harris, whose wild and daring career may be safely said to be without a parallel, pays the penalty of his crimes, which, 'tis said, would fill a volume. Sheriff Calvin Carter will perform the ceremony of giving the prisoner the 'send off,' and the event promises to be a memorable one for the town of Nowhere.

"Without doubt, nearly all of our readers are familiar with the history of the doomed desperado, and the circumstances of his arrest and conviction.

"For years past—ever since the gold-fever up in the Black Hills, Deadwood Dick has been famous, as one of boldest and most slippery of outlaws. He has defied the law, in a hundred or more instances, and, it is said, were all his victims planted side by side, an ordinary cemetery would be inadequate to hold the demand for space. He has been arrested many times, but has always succeeded in making his escape, laughing at the law. At last, however, as the reader is aware, he was nabbed, and all precautions have been taken toward preventing a repetition of his former miraculous escapes.

"Three weeks ago, last night, after being lost to public notice for some time, he dropped down into our sister city, Dodge's Gap, and got into a game of poker, at which he cleaned out every one at the table—an old trick of his. Finally, a quarrel arose—about just what, or between whom, there is no clear data—and there was some lively shooting. Two men were shot dead, and the bystanders charged upon and arrested, and brought to the Nowhere jail, where he is now incarcerated.

"At the trial, last week, the evidence was so powerful and conclusive against the outlaw, that the jury rendered their verdict without retiring—'guilty of murder in the first degree,' and are to be highly commended for so doing.

"Nowhere is yet but a young mining-town, with a population of not over five hundred permanent residents, but this giant stride toward breaking up ruffianism and crime cannot be too highly praised, and promises to be an effective example to evil-doers.

"Deadwood Dick is yet but a comparatively young man, and it is certain, had his talents been turned into the right groove, he would have made a brilliant and worthy citizen. But, it appears, from early boyhood, he was possessed of a restless, dare-devil nature, and it has finally brought down retribution upon his head.

"Judge Asa Amity, who conducted the trial, sentenced Deadwood Dick to be hanged to-day, and in closing made an eloquent appeal to our people to do all in their power to assist in putting down wrongdoing and crime.

"The execution will be public, and during the night the town has been filling up with people from the neighboring camps, who are bent on seeing the fun. It is estimated that nearly every town along the Pahransat range will be represented—which, by the way, will be a great help toward giving our model town a boom.

"EXECUTION DAY CHAFF.

"It is said that Deadwood Dick has a strong and well-organized band of allies in the adjacent mountains, and some fears are entertained that the hanging will be interrupted. Every one should go well-armed.

"GOVERNOR SNELLING and Candidate for Governor Stafford have arrived in camp, and are registered at the Prospect House. Whether their coming has anything to do with the approaching execution or not, is a matter of conjecture, as *The Stuff's* able reporter failed to get an interview with the distinguished gentlemen.

"OLD JOE SPRATT, of the 'Frisco dance-house, has erected a temporary out-door bar, where he will dispense good-cheer to the thirsty; and Pablo Pete has made preparations to start a monte game near by. Bow-leg Ben has set up a cake and pie stand in full view of the gallows, and will be well patronized.—*Adv.*

"Work has been entirely suspended in the Crocker mine. The boys don't often have a holiday, and they mean to have a good time.

"ST. BONIFACE'S OIL has cured Bill Bockus of rheumatism.—*Adv.* We can also recommend it.—*Ed.*

"LATER.—All remains quiet within the jail, although a large crowd is grouped about on the outside. The prisoner is said to have passed a comfortable night. Indeed, he has been remarkably cool all along.

"MISSOURI MAG will set out lunch all day, at her 'Pilgrim's Landing' saloon.—*Adv.*

"AFTER the execution, drop in at Levi's and look at his new suits, for \$20, up.—*Adv.*

"LOOK out for an extra edition of *The Stuff* at six P. M., containing full particulars of the hanging."

In order to accommodate an extra demand for his newspaper, the proprietor of *The Stuff* had printed a large edition, and the cry:

"Ere's yer *Stuff*, two bits—full 'ticklers of the execution"—was heard in the prosperous young mining-camp of Nowhere, as early as the break of day, at which hour it was emphatically a dull man who was not up and stirring, considering the important event which was booked to take place, that day.

And *The Stuff* sold rapidly, among those who could read, and such parties as could not read bought copies, and got the better-educated ones to read the news to them.

The camp, at sunrise, contained nearly a thousand souls, a large proportion of the rabble coming from adjacent towns and locales.

Hanging, according to law, was a novelty in those parts, and men who had been accustomed to Judge Lynch's method, wanted to see how Justice did the job.

Nowhere was as lively a camp as there was south of Silver City in the Pahransat range, and a typical one, too, of the mining regions.

It possessed the usual one long main street, on either side of which were the business places, and habitations—a conglomeration of fairly-built houses, cabins, shanties and tents, of various sizes and shapes.

What lines of business, outside of manufacturing, could not be found represented on Nowhere's "Bowery," were few and far between, hence there was no lack of sights, excitement, and "attractions" to wrest money, from the wary and unwary alike.

The Prospect House was the only hotel, and was not only a commodious building, but was conducted on a better scale than the average hotel of the mines.

Opposite this hotel was Missouri Mag's place, also a large "shebang," devoted to terpsichore, gambling and Bacchanalian orgies.

The stone jail was next; then came a long string of buildings, devoted to various classes of business, from the Chinese laundry to the smithy; from the Jew clothing store and pawnshop to the tented museum of curiosities: "Bilkens' Branch of Barnum's Greatest Show On Earth," the flaring streamer, and hideous show paintings announced.

Every camp has its "biggest man in town," as a matter of course, and Nowhere was no exception to the rule.

Colonel Ezra Crocker, the owner of the Crocker lode, was about the most important personage, while ranking next was Senor Jose Sebastian, a speculator and stock broker, as well as the local banker.

Descending from the sublime to the ridiculous, as it were, the next two much-remarked persons were "Sis" Soaker and Gilderoy O'Gall, often surnamed the Twin Bums.

Now, what the sponging, irresponsible red-nose rum-punisher, known as the "rounder," is, to city life, were the Twins to Nowhere society. They almost invariably traveled together, and aside from being beats of the most pronounced order, and capable of any mild criminal offense, their main aim in life appeared to be the maneuvering and skirmishing for free drinks.

Every one knew them, and considered them entirely innocent of being dangerous, further than their voracious appetites for "benzine" were concerned.

Soaker always took the lead, he being a trifle more portly and good looking than O'Gall, although both were disgusting in appearance, the bad liquor they drank damaging their natural beauty.

The firm of Soaker & O'Gall, "gents of leisure, side-walk inspectors, and internal revenue

agents appointed to examine, test and pronounce upon all malt and spirituous liquors," had no permanent abiding-place, and generally put up for the night, on the soft side of the doorstep most convenient to the locality, where their bewildered legs gave out.

Bright and early, however, on the morning of October 25th, which was the day set for the execution of Deadwood Dick, these two worthies crawled out of an empty prairie "schooner," not far from the hotel, where they had lodged for as many as two nights, without being disturbed.

"Gilderoy O'Gall, how ranketh the condition o' yer b'iler, this autumnal morn'!" Soaker demanded, adjusting his cravat.

"Faith an' be jabers, Sissy O'Soaker, me sthumick feels as if the devil had got into it. It's a docthor I'm in need av, an' o' course it is!"

"There ye are again, callin' me O'Soaker. Haven't I told you, time and again, that my name isn't O'Soaker, but plain Soaker, Esquire? As for your stomick, the best remedy prescribed by eminent psychologists, is a small dose of the essence of old Bezam, taken prior to a little water."

"An' d'yez have to have a prescription, Mr. O'Soaker?"

"Nary prescrip, Mr. O'Gall. Missouri Magdalen doth mix up the beverage equal to Doctor Tanner, hisself. Take my arm, Mr. O'Gall, and we will proceed to the drug store and state the nature of our mutual diseases."

And arm in arm, the Twins made a bee-line for the Pilgrim's Landing.

Missouri Mag, by no means an uncomely female, was wearing glasses, behind the bar. She was a buxom party, with a resolute expression of countenance, and hard, steely eyes.

Margaret conducted her own business, and had often proven she was very capable of doing it, by active use of one or more of the ready cocked revolvers which conspicuously ornamented a shelf, behind the bar.

To arouse her ire meant danger, and the citizens of Nowhere had learned to walk very carefully when they entered her place of business, for fear of disastrous consequences.

With that peculiar grace which none knew better how to exercise, than the Twins, when in quest of a gratuitous drink, Soaker & Co., glided up to the bar, and doffed their battered chapeaus.

"Why, good-morning to you, Miss Missouri!" accosted Soaker, courtesying low, while by agreement, O'Gall contorted his features into a hideous expression of misery. "You will pardon me for interrupting your morning duties, but the fact is I am unfortunately in a dire state of trouble—that is to say, my friend is. He has suddenly been attacked with *pleuro-gastral-fullamozo* of the digestive organs, and unless he has immediate aid, will die. We fail to find the local physician at his residence, and as a last resort come to you. Experience has developed, and scientists have demonstrated the fact, that a little whisky, taken immediately after a drink of cold water, will afford temporary relief. So if you will set out the decanter we will see what we can do for my afflicted friend."

"Oh! yis, boorray up!" groaned O'Gall, bending over, as though in great distress. "Och! bloody murder, phat pain I have!"

Missouri Mag gave O'Gall a sharp glance. She knew the Twins of old, as thoroughbreds; but O'Gall did really look so used up, that she set forth the bottle, without hesitation, whereupon the "sick man" took a long pull, and then passed it back to Soaker, who finished the contents, and set it down upon the bar, with a grateful smile.

"Much obliged, Miss Magdalen—very much obliged! I think we shall now be able to do full justice to our breakfast at the Prospect House. Good mor—"

"Whoa!" Missouri Mag cried, as they were about fling out. "Haven't you forgotten something?"

"Eh? Forgotten something? Ah! really, it must have been my umbrella. I say, O'Gall, did you see where I left my—"

"See here, my dead-beat, none o' your monkey business. Do you come down for the drinks quicker than blazes, or off goes your head! You loafers can't work yer rackets on me!"

And the Twins beheld a pair of six shooters leveled at them, back of which Mag's face looked even more determined than usual.

Soaker grew fidgety, while O'Gall's knees fairly knocked together, so terrified was he.

"Oh, dear Miss Magdalen, be composed!" gasped Soaker. "Just chalk it on the back of a cigar-box, until I get a dollar owed me by

Bow-leg Ben, and I will fly to your presence and liquidate the slight indebtedness."

"Nary! Too old and thin. Come down, or there'll be two more lights put out to-day aside o' Deadwood Dick's!"

Soaker turned despairingly to O'Gall.

"Lordy, Gil, old ribs, what a fix! Have ye got a red?"

"Nary!" O'Gall declared solemnly.

"Nor I. Aha! a thought strikes me. My brother-in-law, Gov'ner Snelling, is in town. You stay here, Gilly, while I go bounce the old chap for a saw-buck."

"None o' that! Are you going to come down?" cried Mag, sharply.

"Upon our sagacity an' honor, we haven't the copper-dust from a red cent!" groaned Soaker.

"Then give me yer sbirts. They'll do."

Soaker looked at O'Gall, then both grinned.

Neither of them possessed such a garment.

Just at this instant a man entered and stepped up to the bar.

"Put up the tools!" he commanded. "I'll pay for these fellows' cordial. Come up, boys, and wet your whistles again; then I want to use you!" an announcement that caused Missouri Mag to open her eyes.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOVERNOR'S REFUSAL.

IN the best suit of rooms of the Prospect House, consisting of a parlor and four communicating rooms, the Governor Snelling party had been installed on their arrival in Nowhere.

The party consisted of Governor Snelling, a grave, official-looking gentleman, of rather impressive looking face and figure; Daniel G. Stafford, who had been announced as candidate for Governor for the ensuing term; Ross Rockville, the Governor's private secretary, and Miss Estelle Stafford, the candidate's accomplished and handsome daughter.

The gubernatorial party had arrived by stage late the previous night; yet, despite this fact, daybreak found Mr. Stafford up and seated in the parlor, with that mushroom sheet, *The Stuff*, spread out before him.

He was a large, handsome personage, this candidate for the highest office in the young State, with iron-gray hair and well-trimmed beard; his eyes were brown and of kindly expression, and, as a whole, he looked to be a person of a warm and kindly nature, with a will to do good whenever it came within his power.

He had been reading *The Stuff's* editorial on the approaching execution, and there was an expression of displeasure upon his face.

"It looks like a gala-day advertisement," he commented. "I do not like the spirit of the affair. Be he the worst of criminals, this Deadwood Dick may have a heart in him, that would revolt from having his last moments tortured by a jeering crowd. I will speak to Snelling about it!"

General Stafford and Governor Snelling had been warm friends from childhood, and their long friendship made them like brothers to each other.

Snelling, having extensive mining interests, had declined renomination, and therefore, had influenced his friend, the general, to become a candidate, and the chances were that Stafford would poll a majority vote at the forthcoming election.

Shortly after General Stafford had finished his perusal of the paper, the Governor entered the parlor with a pleasant good-morning.

To all outward appearances the chief magistrate was an easy-going and good-humored gentleman, yet those who knew him in his official capacity knew him only as a man of honor and integrity, prompt, stern, and immovable from the groove of his candid opinion as a mountain of rock.

He had made a satisfactory executive, however, and there were few who could say aught against him.

"Good-morning, Snelling," Stafford said, in answer to the official's greeting. "I trust you feel rested after yesterday's tiresome jaunt."

"Yes, thank you—so much so, in fact, that I believe I shall set out for the capital without further delay, as there is a pressure of business awaiting me there."

"But, Governor, you should not tire yourself out. Why not tarry here a few days? The rest will do you good."

"Perhaps; but, you see, I prefer to go on. Will you accompany me?"

"I think not. This mountain air and wild scenery rather attracts me. Then, too, I've taken a sudden interest in a case here and

want a little of your co-operation, if you will grant it."

"Ah! you want to work up a little political boom, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! Let politics take care of themselves, for the present. I want to save a man's life."

Governor Snelling's face changed in expression.

"What now, Stafford—another of your eccentric notions? You surely do not mean—"

"Precisely that, and no more, sir. I want to save the sentenced outlaw, Deadwood Dick, from the gallows!"

Snelling's face assumed the cold, business-like hardness of expression which was peculiar to his executive life.

"Well, I surely didn't give you credit for being a crank, Dan!" he said, but your wish is most extraordinary!"

"So it may seem to you, but I assure you I have causes for wishing to prevent this sacrifice of human life."

"What are they?"

And Governor Snelling tipped back in his easy-chair, and lit a cigar, adding:

"I never thought you would develop into a counsel for criminals, general."

"Neither have I. But as I said, I have causes for not wishing this execution to take place, to-day!"

"Name them! name them! Have you fallen in love with this famous fly-by-night fellow, or are you afraid his cronies will exert a bad effect on your chances, at the coming election?"

"Nothing of the sort, sir. To explain all to you would require too much time. You are aware, I suppose of the misfortune that befell me, years ago?"

"Ah! yes."

"Well, late last night, as we drove into this town, I pressed my face to the window-pane in the coach-door, and what do you suppose I saw?"

"Oh! a skeleton from the gubernatorial closet, no doubt!" and the Governor laughed dryly.

"Nonsense! Nothing of the kind. I saw the devil-in-human-shape who did me the wrong, so many years ago—yes, the same evil, exulting face."

Snelling looked interested.

"It can't be possible!" he exclaimed. "Where was he?"

"Standing upon the step of the stage-coach, and glaring in at me!" the general cried, excitedly.

He arose and paced to and fro across the room, his brow knitted, and his agitation great.

Governor Snelling, too, seemed considerably affected by the same cause which so disturbed his friend's peace of mind.

"This all seems incredible, Dan," he said, taking a long whiff at his cigar. "I thought that deadly vendetta settled, years ago!"

Stafford shook his head.

"No! no!" he answered hoarsely—"it never will be ended until Pierre Parrimore is dead. The accursed feud has swept away two generations, and threatens to destroy a third!"

"You are sure it was Parrimore's face you saw—positive of it?"

"Do you not think I have cause to remember it? When I look back and remember—but, God! I cannot recall the past without breaking down!"

Snelling had never seen his friend as deeply affected as now.

"You had better come back with me to the city, general," he said, "and forget all this trouble!"

"Forget it, sir? Never. I shall stay here and wring from the lips of that fiend incarnate the whole truth, or die in the attempt. The feud has got to be ended sometime, and somewhere, and it may as well be ended in this place as anywhere. When it is ended, either I or Pierre Parrimore will be a corpse!"

The general spoke with a fierce determination that Snelling knew it would be useless to attempt to break.

It was a bitter, inextinguishable vendetta between two proud old Southern families, entailing doom to generation after generation—such a deadly feud as few countries except the fiery-blooded South could produce.

"Well, of course you are your own master; but as a friend, I'd not advise you to endanger your own life, and that of your daughter, by attempting an adjustment of the difficulty at present, and especially here in this rough town!" the Governor said.

"I am resolved, and shall do it. Of course, Snelling, I cannot ask you to mix up in the case,

but you have it in your power to do me a great favor!"

"If so, name it, and I will give it due consideration. I believe, general, I have never refused to aid you?"

"No, you have not. But this is a favor of a rather peculiar nature. I want you to pardon Deadwood Dick!"

The Governor looked at his friend in unassumed astonishment.

"Why, Dan, are you mad?" he ejaculated.

"Oh! no—not mad, nor the least affected with dementia!" General Stafford replied, calmly. "I want you to pardon this Deadwood Dick. He is one of the shrewdest detectives and most reliable men upon the frontier, and, of all others, would assist me most in fighting my battle with Pierre Parrimore!"

"It is impossible, sir—utterly preposterous. As much as I regard you, as a friend, general, I do not care to bring censure down upon my head by pardoning this condemned desperado, just when my official career is about to expire. Such a proceeding would have no precedent in the history of the American Government."

"But, you can at least reprieve him, on some not groundless plea?"

"Even that I should hesitate to do, as I believe the fellow fully deserves the fate that justice has pronounced for him. If I should reprieve him, what would it avail you?"

"Much. Reprieve him, and I'll see to it he escapes from jail!"

"You, General Stafford?"

"Yes, I!"

"I am more and more astonished at you. Suppose your political supporters were to know of this?"

"Bah! Politics and vengeance don't always travel hand in hand. I am desperate, Governor, and I mean to adopt desperate measures, to end the vendetta, that has so long existed!"

"You will have to do so, then, without my co-operation!" the Governor said, rising, and tossing his cigar out of the window. "I cannot, in a case like this, interfere with the mandates of the law!"

"Governor!"

"General, it is useless to argue on the point. My decision is final!"

"Stop! We have been friends from childhood. Shall this foolish obstinacy on your part make us henceforth enemies?"

"As you like about that!" the Executive replied, haughtily. "I know my business, sir, and allow no man rule me!"

With his hot Southern blood aroused, and his face burning with passion, General Stafford sprang to his feet.

"Very well, sir—so be it! When you return to the capital, announce for me that Daniel Stafford declines the nomination for Governor, and, sir, henceforth consider me no longer your friend."

Without replying, the Governor bowed, in his stately way, and turning, left the room.

Daniel Stafford soon followed.

His face still showed traces of great anger, when he stepped from the hotel, into the already thronged main street of Nowhere, and there was, in the glitter of his eyes, a set look of indomitable resolution.

CHAPTER III.

A BOLD MOVE.

FINDING out, by inquiry, the location of the office of Sheriff Calvin Carter, General Stafford made his way toward it, a bold plan forming in his mind as he went.

We have failed to state that, in general appearance, the general and the Governor greatly resembled each other.

Both were portly and stately-looking men; both had broad, massive faces, and wore iron-gray beards of the same style of cut, and as they dressed quite alike, a stranger to them meeting but one on the street would have been puzzled to know whether he had met the Executive or the candidate.

Of this resemblance General Stafford was well aware, and as he made his way toward the sheriff's office he resolved upon a bold attempt to make it of avail in his emergency.

At the hotel the stage had just arrived, and would depart again within a few minutes.

"I'll do it, if I hang for it!" the general muttered. "All's fair in love or war—and it stands a matter of war, now."

He turned abruptly, and retraced his steps to the hotel.

Governor Snelling was in the bar-room.

Stafford went up-stairs to the parlor, and saw that the Governor's bedroom-door was open. Looking in, he discovered the general's valise

upon the bed, wide open, as if just packed, ready for locking.

With the audacity of a professional burglar, the general went carefully through the contents, extracting some cards and the gubernatorial seal.

"This is a prison job!" he muttered; "but the hour has come when I must strike for vengeance, and nothing shall deter me!"

Pocketing the articles he had purloined, he left the room and knocked at his daughter's door.

A beautiful young lady quickly appeared, attired ready for the journey.

"Ah! you are ready, eh?" the general said. "Good! You are to proceed as far as Big Basin, and from there take the next stage returning here."

"But, father—"

"Sh! not a word. D'ye hear? 'Tis the vendetta again. Go! Obey me implicitly, and ask no questions till we meet again. Go! the stage is ready."

She gave him a frightened, piteous glance, and, taking her small hand-sachel, left the parlor.

As soon as she was gone Stafford quickly entered his own room, and taking a blank sheet of paper from his effects, attached the gubernatorial seal to the bottom of it.

He then restored the stamp to its case, and in a twinkling it was back in its position in Snelling's valise.

Stafford then re-entered his room and locked the door.

A few minutes later, he heard the Governor, and Ross Rockville, his secretary, in the parlor; then, they once more descended the stairs, and shortly afterward, the stage rumbled away.

"Now, then!" the general gritted.

Without delay, he transferred his own effects into the room the departed executive had just vacated, and took possession of the key.

After a short time, he went down to the hotel office, and glanced at the register.

"Ah! my friend General Stafford, concluded not to stop over, eh?" he observed, putting on his gold-rimmed glasses.

The clerk stared.

"I don't understand you, sir! The Governor, his secretary, and Miss Stafford left, just a bit ago, on the stage!" he said.

"I was not aware that I had departed yet, sir. You have evidently made a mistake, or else the general has been up to one of his old tricks of palming himself off for me. If any one calls for me I am at the sheriff's office."

And, flinging down a card, upon which was a miniature gubernatorial seal, and the name "Gov. R. T. Snelling," he walked away, leaving the clerk too awe-stricken, to immediately speak.

As soon as he had somewhat recovered, he made the correction on the register, and, ere long, it was pretty generally known that Governor Snelling was still in town.

The general, after quitting the hotel, made his way to the sheriff's dingy little office, and found that personage, a burly, but not unprepossessing individual, "at home," but looking rather nervous.

He glanced at his visitor, with a somewhat gruff "good-morning!"

"You're the sheriff, I suppose?" the general said, coming at once to the point.

"I allow I am," was the reply. "Who are you?"

"I am Governor Snelling, sir"—throwing down a card. "Be kind enough to write me out a permit to visit your local jail, and interview the condemned prisoner."

Carter stared.

"Reckon ef you're ther Guv'nor, ye don't need no sech thing as that!" he grunted.

"Oh no, not necessarily, of course, but I thought it would save the annoyance of being cross-questioned by the guard."

"Guess they'd be apt ter ax ye purty sharp, fer a fact!" Carter replied. "They don't intend to let the cuss slip, this load o' hay!"

He seized a pen, wrote out the permit, and, armed with it, Stafford left the office.

"Now, then, to see what Deadwood Dick has to say!" he muttered, as he made his way along the crowded street toward the jail. "If he comes to terms, he goes free. If he don't—well—"

He compressed his lips, tightly!

CHAPTER IV.

M'CLURG'S PLOT—GENERAL STAFFORD'S STORY.

FOR the Twins to refuse a chance to "oil up," at the stranger's expense, was a thing completely out of the question; consequently they stepped up to the bar, feeling far more at ease

than when Missouri Mag had had them under revolver surveillance.

"Drink? On course we'll drink!" Sissy Soaker declared, enthusiastically. "It ain't often we do indulge in the flowing bowl, my dear sir; but when we do, it's allus wi' fust-class gentlemen, like yerself, and at this peculiar matinal period. Since this is the first time we have met, ter use the language o' the immortal Rip, mine is old Bezam!"

"Bedad, an' I'll take a Limerick float, ef ye please?" chimed in Gilderoy O'Gall. "There's nothin' mean about me, ef I am the unworthy representative av a bleedin' counthry!"

The drink was produced, and the stranger threw down a golden half-eagle, in payment, after which the liquor was dashed off.

The stranger was an imposing personage, of some fifty odd years, with a massive form, and military erectness of bearing. He possessed, however, a dark, stern face, with piercing black eyes, and his full beard and curling hair were of the same jetty color.

He was well dressed, and evidently a man of means. Although there was really nothing sinister in his appearance, he was hardly a man to impress favorably. Perhaps it was because he was so dark.

After the drinks, he took a cigar-case from his pocket, extracted a fragrant Havana for himself, and then passed the case to the Twins, with the sententious invitation to "puff."

"By the green goggles o' Cleopatra, we've struck a reg'lar reef!" Soaker whispered to O'Gall.

"A reef? Bedad, it's a reg'lar elerfunt," responded the lesser Twin.

"Now, gents," the stranger said, gathering up his change, "if you'll come back, and take a seat, we'll have a little private conference."

He led the way to a table, some distance from the bar, and seated himself, motioning Soaker and O'Gall to do likewise.

After puffing at his cigar a few minutes, and eying the Twins through the cloud of smoke, the stranger said:

"Well, we'll get down to business. My name is Bill McClurg. What is yours?"

"Our handles aire respectively Soaker and O'Gall, at your service. We are Government liquor-testers for this district!" Soaker announced, profoundly.

"In other words, you are two thoroughbred bums!" McClurg added. "As long as you can strike a free-drink and lunch-route, you are all O. K.! Ain't that so?"

"Shore, an' he's a phrenologist, Sis; he kin read our bumps!" O'Gall chuckled, nudging his partner.

"Avast, you fool!" Soaker cried, dramatically; "why thus malign thyself? No, sir, my friend; you do us a preponderating insult by insinuating such a thing. We are gentlemen of leisure, and nature's noblemen—we are!"

"Yes, so I now perceive. Yet, despite this prodigious fact, I presume were it within your province, you would not shun an opportunity to make a hundred dollars, between you?" McClurg suggested.

"Well, I should cough up a kitten!"

"And I should demoralize a peratie!"

Such were the instantaneous ejaculations, of the "firm" of Soaker & O'Gall.

"I thought so!" the stranger said. "And, now, as briefly as possible, I'll tell you what I want. In the first place, I want to engage the services of two active fellows, who can be implicitly trusted!"

"That's us!" declared Soaker. "We can be trusted with a whole railroad, even."

"Because you can't run away with it, eh? Pretty good, that. But, in my case, you'll neither be intrusted with railroads, or national banks. Your work will be light and easy, and the remuneration prompt. So, will you take the job, or not? I must have a decisive answer!"

"Guess you're gittin' ahead o' the cart, ain't ye? How aire we going to give you answer, until ye tell us the peculiar nature of ther job ye want us to tackle?"

"Easy enough. If your palms itch to feel the soothing influence of a pair of fifty-dollar notes, you say 'yes.' If to the contrary, you say 'no!'"

Soaker and O'Gall exchanged glances. They were, by no means, as great ignoramuses as many took them to be.

"It aire a fact that we have that peculiar skin-deep disease, known as itchin' for money," Soaker assented, "but as ter puttin' our fut in the fire, without knowing how hot it is, I reckon we don't have any o' that in our bitters—eh, Mr. O'Gall?"

"You kin bet yer swate life, not!" Mr. O'Gall affirmed.

"Well, then, I suppose I shall have to tell you what I want!" McClurg went on. "I want you to attack a man, who is my deadly enemy, and to cut his throat!"

Both Soaker and O'Gall put up their hands in holy horror.

"Murdtherf?" gasped O'Gall.

"Murder?" repeated Soaker.

"Yes, if you want to call it that!" McClurg returned, complacently. "It's nothing, however, to make bones over. Why, I often find a pleasant little pastime, to cut to a man's heart, or to slit his windpipe!"

The bums looked too horrified to speak.

Proverbially bad and unreliable as was their reputation, outright murder was a thing entirely foreign to their line of business.

"Well, what d'ye say?" McClurg demanded, grimly. "D'ye want the job, or not?"

"None in my broth, ef you please," Soaker gasped.

"Nor here!" breathed O'Gall. "You're an insultin' omadhaun, be jabers, to be proposin' the loikes to respectable gintlemen like us!"

"Ha, ha! pretty good! Well, so-along! I'll tackle some other galoot who is not so scrupulous as you two cranks. I thought you had good stuff in you, but I see you are two idiotic bums," and rising, the man left the saloon, leaving the liquor inspectors staring at each other in blank amazement.

"Shore, an' did he mane it?" O'Gall demanded of his comrade.

"That's just what I war scientiffically deliberatin' on," Soaker replied. "I tell ye, Gilderoy O'Gall, that fellow is up to some mischief, and it behooves us to now eternally distinguish ourselves as brilliant meteors o' this glorio conglomeration o' mud, by organizing ourselves into a detective force ter inquire inter ther private affairs of that particular galoot. Not on will we achieve honor that will carry our grail in butter to the grave, but there's gallo o' bug in the perspective. What say ye?"

"It's a go!" O'Gall declared emphatically.

In a cell of the stone jail at Nowhere, Deadwood Dick, the condemned prisoner, lay upon the rude cot, listening to the rabble in the street without—for the hum of human voices was clearly audible.

He was attired with that neatness characteristic of the man, and his handsome face was a trifle paler than when daily kissed by the sun and mountain breezes.

The expression upon his face and in his dark, magnetic eyes was one of gravity and resignation. He had come to believe that the last hope for him in this life had faded out, and that his execution was now a thing inevitable.

Indeed, why should he believe differently? He was a stranger in a strange town, with not a friend or acquaintance near to make a plea in his behalf.

Up in the mountains he had, previous to his capture, organized a band of daring fellows with a view of prospecting in a dangerous locality; but they in all probability had not heard of his arrest.

About the time of the trial he had written an appeal to the Governor, but it had never been noticed.

It therefore remained plain to him that nothing short of a miracle could save him.

Dick was gloomily meditating upon the unenviable prospect before him, when the door opened, and one of the guards entered—a rather prepossessing looking fellow, about whom there appeared to be little that was rough, or bad.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," he said, bowing. "You will receive him, I presume?"

Dick smiled, faintly.

"Oh! yes, I suppose so. Who is he?"

"The Gov'nor, sir."

"Ha! How do you know?"

"He brought a permit from the sheriff."

"Very well. Send him in. What time is it?"

"Nearly nine o'clock!"

How fast the hours seemed to fly!

It would soon be one o'clock!

A few minutes later, General Stafford, was ushered in, and left alone with the prisoner.

Before speaking, the two men looked each other over, rather critically, as if "sizing" each other.

The general was the first to break the silence.

"Well, sir, I suppose you are somewhat curious, as to the nature of my visit?" he queried.

"Not particularly!" Dick replied. "I am somewhat surprised, however, from the fact that I can hardly see through your masquerade!"

"My masquerade?" the general echoed, with start. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," replied Deadwood Dick, coolly, "that the guard announced the Governor, and I naturally expected to see him."

"Indeed! Am I not the Governor?"

"You are not! I happen to know the Governor, by sight, and while you in some respects bear a resemblance to him I can readily detect the counterfeit."

General Stafford laughed.

"Well, you're a sharp one," he confessed. "In truth, I hardly expected to pass muster before your sharp inspection. I am General Daniel Stafford. I am playing off Governor, however, at a prison risk, and that, too, in your interest—or, more appropriately, in our mutual interests!"

"Indeed? How does this happen?"

"I shall explain. You are a daring fellow, even if you have your faults, and the sentence upon your head is an unjust one."

"How do you know that?"

"It is merely a personal opinion. I suppose you know that preparations have been made to hang you, to-day?"

"I am so aware, sir."

"Have you had any hopes of escaping the noose?"

"None. I have given up all hope, of again breathing the air of freedom!"

"Have you no hope of aid from your band, and to be quartered somewhere in the neighboring mountains?"

"None. I doubt if they even know I am in trouble, or they would have been to my rescue. This. When I left them they did not expect me back for two weeks."

"Ah! Then your prospects would indeed be bright but for me."

"But for you?"

"Exactly. So far as I now know, I am the only person who can, or, at least, will save you from the gallows."

"I yet fail to understand what you are driving at. If you will make things plainer, I may be able to speak more freely."

"Well, I came here to save you from the scaffold."

"On conditions, I presume?"

"Well, yes; but they are such as you will not be apt to reject."

"That depends. Go on."

"With pleasure. I have an enemy who seeks my life, and I in turn seek his, for reasons which I will explain. Did you ever hear of a man in this section of the country, by the name of Pierre Parrimore?"

Dick started.

"Pierre Parrimore?" he ejaculated. "Well, I should say so! He is a member of my present band!"

"By Heaven, then it is lucky we have met! Sir, believe me or not, that man is a demon incarnate—a combination of all that is evil!"

"I am prepared for your assertion," Dick replied. "I have never regarded the man any too favorably, and I fancy he discovered it, for he took no pains to conceal a strong dislike for me."

"Well, a long generation ago, there lived upon adjoining plantations, in the South, two proud and honorable old families, named respectively Stafford and Parrimore. Each house boasted of blue blood, and possessed great wealth, in addition to the value of their plantations."

"For years, the two families had been on terms of sociability and friendship; but at last a rupture occurred, over some trivial affair, and the result was, a duel, then so much in vogue, among the Southern gentlemen. Both the heads of the respective families were mortally wounded—my father, and the father of the present Pierre Parrimore."

"Upon their deathbeds, they each exacted promises from their children that the vendetta should be continued."

"At that time there were three brothers in each family, I being the youngest of the Stafford boys."

"Well, a year had not passed after my father's death, ere the eldest son of each family lay cold in death. Within the next three years the second oldest succumbed to this terrible feud. I alone remained to avenge those who had gone before, upon the sole remaining representative of the Parrimores—this Pierre. He soon left the State."

"I gave chase, taking my young wife with me. Years passed, but Pierre Parrimore and I were not destined to meet, although frequent reports advised me that we were not far apart, and

were each awaiting a favorable chance to end the feud forever."

"In the mean time, my wife had borne me three as lovely children as the Southern sun ever looked down upon. They were named Stella, Ned, and Bijou; Stella being the eldest, Ned next, and Bijou next, and there being about a year's difference in their respective ages. By the time Bijou was ten, Ned eleven, and Stella twelve, which, by the way, was seven years ago, I had taught and trained them with great care, so that they were experts in the use of the pistol, and even my wife was nearly as much of an adept as myself."

"Well, one day, I got a letter from Chattanooga, purporting to be from an old friend, stating that Pierre Parrimore was there, and had developed into considerable of a sporting man. Instantly my blood boiled for vengeance, and I set out for Chattanooga, accompanied by my eldest daughter, who was ever my companion in travel. On my arrival there, I called upon my friend, and learned that he had never written me—the letter was a forgery!"

"Fearing the worst, I immediately telegraphed home, and learned that my wife had been found dead at home—evidently killed after a severe struggle, while Ned and Bijou were missing."

"That was seven years ago last night, and although I have resorted to every possible means to obtain tidings of Pierre Parrimore, or my children, if they be living, I never have succeeded. But, last night, for the first time in many years, I saw the face of my foe!"

CHAPTER V.

DEADWOOD DICK'S PROMISE.

GENERAL STAFFORD'S recital had been given with great earnestness, and his hearer listened with undisguised interest.

"You say you saw Pierre Parrimore's face last night!" repeated Deadwood Dick. "Where was the fellow, at the time?"

"We were coming into Nowhere, upon the stage, when I peered out of the window, to see just where we were. My astonishment knew no bounds, when I beheld another human face pressed to the outside of the window-pane, and that face Pierre Parrimore's!"

"You are sure?"

"Positive. He was standing on the step of the vehicle and glaring in at me."

"Describe the face."

"It was swarthy, and one of those malignantly evil faces which age does not particularly affect. The eyes are of the most intense black, and the hair and fierce mustache and beard of the same color. A forehead, over which the hair was combed low, for the purpose of concealing a scar; a large, sensual mouth; a fact most repulsive in aspect yet not a ruffian in looks or demeanor."

"You have accurately photographed the fellow I have known as Pierre Parrimore!" Deadwood Dick assented. "If he is in this camp I fear all has gone wrong among my own band. The fellow seemed to have considerable influence among the boys, and it occurred to me, several times, that he was trying to transform the party into a desperado gang. Some of my followers would refuse to go over to him, but there is, among the number, material for an outlaw band, and it may be possible that those who swore to follow me into the Apache country in search of old mines have gone back on me, and Parrimore is now their captain."

"I hope not, for if so, my battle with him might not prove an easy victory!"

"Right you be! The men I selected would be human tigers to battle with. Yet, were I free, and they traitors to me—for our oath of loyalty as a brotherhood, was no idle form, but an all-powerful one—I'd fight them to the bitter end!"

"Well, independent of the other oaths, all you have to do is swear that you will help me hunt down Pierre Parrimore; do this and you shall not pay the penalty justice has imposed upon you. Understand, you are not to dye your hand in the villain's blood unless I fall. Then, you are to take up the vendetta, and bound Pierre Parrimore to death, the same as though I were your kith and kin; and you are also to make all efforts in your power to learn the fate of my missing children."

"Your eldest daughter still lives?"

"She does. She will be back here in Nowhere to-morrow."

"And for what you have outlined, I am to have my freedom?"

"Have you are."

"In what manner do you propose to secure my release?"

General Stafford exhibited the blank sheet of paper, to the left-hand lower corner of which was attached the gubernatorial seal.

"You comprehend?" he asked, significantly.

"Ah! you propose to fill out a pardon?"

"Exactly."

"Isn't that rather a desperate move?"

"Perhaps; but I mean to go through with it, be the consequences what they may."

"But, even if pardoned, I should have to fight my way through the mob to get out of the camp. You can safely bet they'd not let me walk away, scot free, without making it warm for me!"

"Maybe not. I'll have you remanded to jail, under gubernatorial protection, perhaps, until a favorable opportunity offers to get you out. Anyhow, I'll work it somehow. Have I your promise?"

"You have. The word of Deadwood Dick is as good as his oath!"

"Very well. I accept it as such. I will now leave you to await developments, while I work outside. Be of good cheer, then, and keep a stiff upper lip, even when the clouds may seem the darkest!"

"No fear about that!" was Dick's assurance. "Had I no possible show of escaping, I fancy I would not walk to the scaffold with my knees knocking together."

The general left the jail and went leisurely back to the hotel, conscious that he was the target for many pairs of eyes, and also became cognizant of the fact that Deadwood Dick was not wrong in judging that, even though pardoned, he would have to fight his way out of the town.

Arriving at the Prospect House, he found a letter awaiting him, tucked under the door of his room.

At the first glance at the superscription he saw that the message was from his mortal foe, Pierre Parrimore.

Hastily tearing away the envelope, he perused, with paling countenance, what was written within.

It was as follows:

"DAN STAFFORD:—

"Sir:—Your presence here is no secret to me, and I suppose while we are so near together, we might as well end the vendetta."

"Of course, we could meet openly, and mow each other down after the style of our hot-headed fathers; but I'll be frank with you and tell you that I am not such a fool as that. Oh, no! I am too much interested in the preservation of my own life to foolishly risk it."

"I am aware of the pretty little scheme you've got for my annihilation, and you may be surprised when I inform you that I shall make no effort to thwart it. I want you to get everything worked up to a point where you are jubilantly sure of achieving a victory—then, with one fell swoop I'll dash your hopes to the earth, and make the end of your earthly career one of exquisite agony and torture."

"Hound Pierre Parrimore, will ye? You had better never have been born. I hold the flushest winning hand you ever saw, and how I shall gloat over my triumph, when I bring you groveling for mercy at my feet."

"Go ahead. Seek Pierre Parrimore, to end the vendetta, until you find him! I am perfectly content to look on, an amused spectator of your vengeful antics. I am not really decided whether I shall kill your daughter first, or yourself. Ta, ta."

"Your good genius,

"PIERRE PARRIMORE."

By the time General Stafford had finished the perusal of this message his face was deeply flushed with anger, and an expression of intense hatred gleamed in his eyes.

"Baffle me, will you?" he gritted between his clinched teeth. "We'll see about that. With Deadwood Dick as a cradjutor I can conquer Satan himself. The next thing to consider, is how am I to manage Dick's escape from town."

He paced to and fro, his brows knitted, and his whole mind centered upon the subject.

Every possible plan did he consider—but the cloud did not clear from his brow, proving that the task before him was one of great difficulty.

In the mean time the hour grew nearer and nearer for Deadwood Dick to mount the scaffold across from the Prospect House.

The sun never shone brighter, and it would seem that all things favored the execution.

CHAPTER VI.

RESPIED.

By one o'clock, the time set for the execution, the crowd in Nowhere's one main street was so dense that it was with difficulty any one could squeeze through it.

Now the lynch pic-nic had no longer such an irresistible fascination for the average "galoot," because it was somewhat of an every-day occurrence; but a genuine *bona fide* a

bration, under the auspices of the law, was a thing not to be missed, "for miles of mule-back" as one miner declared.

And the profits of those places that sold "old Bezam," were not lessened by the influx of visitors, and the liquid poison had given many a person a good appetite for the "treat" in store.

One o'clock came, and the sheriff was seen riding toward the scaffold from the direction of his office.

A cheer went up from the throng. The excitement increased visibly, and the mob surged closer to the gallows, eager to "take in the whole show."

Cal Carter dismounted from his horse and mounted the scaffold.

"Feller-citizens!" he cried, "ther execution will not take place to-day. I have here a two days' reprieve, signed by Governor Snelling. The prisoner is to have a motion heard for a new trial to-morrow, before Judge Axtell."

The crowd stood immovable and without utterance. So sudden had come the doom to their sanguine expectations, that they were, for the time being, incapable of action; then, as of one accord, there arose a hoarse, vengeful yell, that fairly made the earth tremble—a yell that had in itself volumes of deadly meaning.

"Where's the Guv'nor? Break his head!"

"Lynch the outlaw!"

"Death to Deadwood Dick!"

"Break in the jail, an' drag the cuss out hyer!"

Such, and kindred cries, were heard on either hand.

"Order!" the sheriff cried. "The Governor's orders must be obeyed. Have patience, boys. The outlaw shall not escape. Bide yer time 'til he's fetched up in court to-morrow; then's the time fer ye to act!"

The words were not without effect—and, but for them, the jail, in all probability, would have been broken open, and the prisoner lynched.

"Yas—wait till ter-morrer, boys!" a prominent and leading spirit among the miners cried. "Then ef we let him escape, its funny!"

One after another accepted that as the best idea, and their opinions influenced others, until finally the mob was brought down to a comparative state of quiet.

Whether it would remain so or not, during the remainder of the day and the night, could be only a matter of conjecture. The ruffian element of Nowhere was by no means in the minority, and headed by a brutal, bullying wretch named Black Bird, it seemed to regard the action of the Governor with savage disfavor.

This feeling grew as the gang felt the influence of much liquor, and had the real Governor Snelling been about town, he would hardly have eared to face that ugly crowd.

Inquiry at the hotel elicited the news that Governor Snelling was in his room, so the street mob's attention was pretty evenly divided between the Prospect House and the jail, where the two talked-about personages of the day were respectively quartered.

"If the Guv'nor tries to leave ther town it won't be healthy for him!" Black Bird declared boldly.

He was a fierce-looking rough, of the most brutal character. His real name was Bird Black, but owing to his forbidding appearance his name had been reversed, and it fitted him well.

And his significant threat was received with manifest approbation by his evil associates.

Nor did Sheriff Cal Carter escape the blast of harsh threats.

"Ef ther prisoner escapes, Cal Carter shall take his place on the plank," was the unanimous verdict.

To which the official calmly replied:

"Ye needn't fear o' his escapin'. My deputy, Frank Fowler, guards the jail wi' five trusty men, an' you can bet thar's no one gits past him!"

Fowler was the young man who had visited Deadwood Dick to announce the call of the "Governor."

The day crept on toward nightfall. The sky had become overcast, and the night promised to be intensely dark.

Gradually the crowd in the street thinned out, until the camp assumed something of its everyday appearance.

This was owing to two causes: A large number of the visitors had mounted their mules or set out on foot en route for their homes in the neighboring towns; while others had crowded into the various drinking-saloons, and were "putting away" the "kill 'em quick" in quantities that threatened ere long to make the camp a pandemonium.

During a free fight in Missouri Mag's place, the vicinity of the jail was temporarily deserted except by Frank Fowler, who stood faithfully at his post.

Just then a boy came along and handed the deputy-sheriff a slip of paper. It contained the following words:

"When you are off duty, at supper-time, call upon me!"

GOVERNOR SNELLING.

No expression of surprise was visible in the young man's face, but he calmly slipped the note in his pocket.

At supper-time he was closeted with General Stafford in the latter's room.

"You sent for me, sir, and I am here."

"Glad you came," Stafford said, blandly.

"Your name, I believe, is Fowler?"

"It is, sir—Frank Fowler."

"What is your business?"

"I have none in particular, except that the sheriff gave me a chance to earn a few dollars as his deputy."

"Your home is not here, then?"

"Oh, no! I came West to seek my fortune, but as yet I haven't found it."

The general felt secretly elated.

"Fortunes don't grow on every bush," he said seriously. "How much money would you want before you would be content to return to your home?"

"If I had a thousand dollars I'd leave this camp behind me mighty quick!" the deputy replied earnestly.

"Then, listen! Set Deadwood Dick at liberty, and you shall have the money."

"That is impossible, sir!"

"Why so?"

"Because I am not the only guard. There are five others."

"Even so; you can work it. You are on duty to-night, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Then, provide yourself with a quart of whisky, and put this drug in it. When the camp quiets down treat your companions. They'll be asleep before they know it. Then release Deadwood Dick, and git up and git yourself. If you like, he will see you to a place of safety."

"And you will give me a thousand dollars to do this?"

"Ay! two of 'em, if you will swear to do the job on the square, and be silent."

"Then I'm your man! I've a sort of tender feeling for the sport, anyhow. Give me the money, and I swear Deadwood Dick shall be liberated to-night!"

"If I pay you, now, you have every chance to skeddaddle with the money, without fulfilling your agreement!" the general said, eying his man, shrewdly.

"If you have that little faith in me, you had better not employ me!" Fowler said, candidly.

"It is a dishonorable piece of work, I know, and were it not that I'd like to return home, I'd never think of accepting your offer."

"There's nothing dishonorable in saving a brave man's life. Here, I will give you a thousand dollars down. When I see Deadwood Dick safe out of jail, you shall have the rest. I will not be far out of sight when you release him, and will intercept you, and give you the rest. Is this satisfactory?"

"It is. I will trust you, even though you are afraid to place confidence in me!"

"Very well. Here is the money, and the drug. I shall be on the lookout, about two, A. M."

Fowler received the money, and took his departure.

"Ha! ha! Who says I won't succeed, now?" the general chuckled, exultantly. "Ah! Pierre Parrimore, I will yet clutch you by the throat!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESCAPE.

WHEN the inky mantle of night fell over the young mining metropolis, there was still more of a thinning out of the crowd in the street, and few if any of the motley throng remained out of doors, when a drizzling rain set in.

Fowler and the other guards huddled about the door of the jail, and listened to the sounds of drunken revelry, going on in the different saloons.

Black Bird and his gang were up at the Prospect House, as vigilant and watchful as foxhounds. Their presence there, certainly was not without significance. They were waiting

for the Governor to appear, when it was their intention to stop him.

What their designs were, further than this, could but be surmised; it was feared, however, by the law-abiding citizens, that "His Excellency," would be subjected to violence.

Black Bird always traveled "well heeled," with cash, and was by no means stingy about setting out the drink for his men; consequently they grew more vengeful and ugly the drunker they became, all of which gave their leader apparent satisfaction; for he himself kept sober.

About an hour after nightfall, backed by his pals, he approached the counter, in the hotel office, and those who were standing about, knew that the crisis was now come which had been impending, during the afternoon.

"See hyer!" Bird cried, addressing the dapper clerk, over whose eyes General Stafford had so neatly "pulled the wool," "I want ter see Jim Dorsey, the man who runs this 'ere shebang!"

"Mr. Dorsey is ill, and in bed, sir!" the clerk replied, secretly trembling in his boots. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yas, thar is. Just you tote yer shanks up to ther Guv'nor's room, an' tell him thet thar's a party o' gentlemen, down hyer, as wants ter see him!"

"The Governor gave orders to the effect that he was not to be awakened until time for the midnight stage, sir!"

"D'you git, an' tell him ef he don't come down we'll fetch him down, in a hurry!" bel-lowed Black Bird, so ferociously, that Nibbins, the clerk started off on a run, half-frightened out of his wits.

In five minutes, he came back, looking still more frightened, for the Governor was not with him.

"Well, what now?" Black Bird gritted, laying his hand upon the butt of a revolver.

"I knocked repeatedly, sir, but there was no answer. I then opened the door, with a latch-key, and found the room empty!"

"You lie, you cussed thief. Take that!"

And whipping out a revolver, the ruffian fired full at the clerk's breast, inflicting a mortal wound.

Then yelling for his comrades in crime to follow, he bounded away up the stairs, to the second floor.

Uttering fierce curses, the liquor-crazed gang followed, and during the next ten minutes they were heard turning everything topsy-turvy, overhead, in their vain search for the "Governor," who, with discretionary judgment, had "folded his tent and stolen silently away."

When Black Bird and his "braves" returned down-stairs, they were strangely docile, but the "citizens" of that lawless town knew that the change was but the calm before a storm.

In all probability the ruffians intended to wait until the town got quiet, and then take Deadwood Dick from the jail, and wreak a terrible vengeance upon him.

So surmised some, while others, who were not inclined to this opinion, were puzzled to know what was the next act on the programme.

The town became quiet, earlier than usual.

The pouring rain outside, prevented any of the usual street "circuses," and the excitement of the day had so fatigued the goodly citizens that they retired to rest, in preference to staying up late, as was their general custom.

With the rougher class, sleep was a necessity. They were literally soaked with bad liquor, and one by one, began to drop off, into the realms of Morpheus, and once they were "gone," they were gone for the night.

By midnight, although the saloons were still open, there was not a straggling miner to be seen, abroad.

Hugging to the side of the prison, so as to keep as much out of the rain as possible, the guards kept their vigil.

The wind blew through the camp, with piercing chill, and more than once the five companions of young Fowler looked wistfully toward the saloons, with a long-drawn sigh.

"I think a little Bezam wouldn't feel on-friendly to my palate!" one of them at last remarked.

"You bet!" echoed a second. "My stomach feels as tho' et had been fruz fast to an iceberg."

"Why, d'ye want liquor?" spoke up Fowler. "Why didn't you mention about it, long ago? I brought a bottle along on purpose to keep off the chill."

He produced the quart flask, and with joyful exclamations the men took a copious drink.

In a few minutes the bottle was passed around again, and then, again, until it was finally emptied.

One by one, the men sat down by the side of the building, and, to use an old vulgarism, the first they knew they didn't know anything.

They were asleep, beyond immediate awakening.

Frank Fowler then lost no time. He unlocked the jail doors, and aroused Deadwood Dick, unhandcuffed him; without delay, the two men left the prison, and started rapidly off through the darkness.

Not five minutes later Black Bird and a portion of his gang arrived at the jail, and made the discovery of Dick's escape.

Their vindictive yells of rage aroused the town, and were even heard in the distance by three figures who were wending their way into the mountains—Deadwood Dick, Frank Fowler, and General Stafford.

But they were far enough away to safely laugh at their baffled foes.

Nowhere's "celebration" had, after all, turned out rather ingloriously.

CHAPTER VIII.

CATHIE.

ABOUT five miles from the mining-town of Nowhere, and less than a mile from Dark Run Camp, was a cabin, upon the rugged mountain-side, at least a couple of hundred feet above the gulch trail.

Few persons traveling along the stage trail would have noticed the lone habitation, owing to the fact that it was encircled by a hedge-like fringe of firs, through which the winds ever played a mournful dirge.

The cabin, in itself, was but an ordinary affair, yet strongly built, and boasting of the somewhat uncommon luxury of two doors, and two good-sized windows.

In front of this cabin were several beds of beautiful flowers, on either side of a pebbly path, and near at hand, a natural fountain, that threw a silvery spray of water several feet into the air.

In one sense it was a wildly picturesque and cozy little place to dwell; yet that did not signify that happiness prevailed within the humble home.

It was one sunny autumnal afternoon, several days after the events last narrated, when a girl came to the door of the cabin and gazed down the mountain-side, as if expecting some one.

She was young in years—probably not over seventeen, if quite that—but possessed of a supple and graceful figure that was finely developed for one of her years.

In face she could boast of being remarkably pretty. Her features were clear-cut and expressive, with a tempting mouth, eyes like stars, and a generally pleasant appearance.

It was evident, at a glance, that a part of her life had been spent amid surroundings similar to those she now occupied; yet her plain attire in no wise detracted from her beauty, nor qualified the expression of refinement characteristic of her every action.

"Why don't Joe come?" she murmured, as she gazed down toward the rugged stage trail. "I fear—oh! I fear some harm has befallen him, or—"

She did not finish the sentence, but her lips quivered, and tears sprung to her pretty eyes.

These she dashed away, however, and turned back into the cabin to attend to her household duties.

When she reappeared at the door once more, after a lapse of several minutes, an exclamation of astonishment burst from her lips.

Three persons were coming up the trail—two large, powerful men were leading toward the cabin a youth of rather delicate build, who, from all indications, was too drunk to walk alone.

The girl stood in the doorway, watching the advancing trio, her face colorless, and her eyes flashing with indignation.

One of the men was the man who had tried to make a murderous contract with Soaker and O'Gall several days before, at Missouri Mag's place in Nowhere—namely, Bill McClurg. The other man was the ruffian chief of the mining-camp, Black Bird.

At last the two men reached the cabin, and lay their burden down upon the grass in front of the door.

McClurg then looked up at the girl in the doorway with a significant nod.

"You see the effect of your sisterly devotion to him, eh?" he sneered. "By the gods, I should think it were time for even you to renounce him, Cathie!"

"Never!" the girl replied, her eyes flashing. "I will never give Joe up, father. It is not his fault, altogether—it is the accursed liquor."

McClurg laughed hoarsely.

"It isn't all the liquor now, my girl, although he's a good jag of it on board. He's got a bullet-hole through him, so slick an' clean that ef he ever punishes any more Bezam, it will leak out as fast as it goes down!"

Cathie uttered a startled scream, and would have sprung to her brother's side, only that McClurg intercepted her.

"Let him alone!" he commanded, gruffly. "Ye can't do him no good, for he's dead already, ye see! We sorter walked him up hyer so ye wouldn't git skeert and faint. Yas, little one, Joe's had his last drunk fer sure!"

"And who brought him to a drunkard's grave? Who brought liquor within his reach—who, but you, who claim to be our parent? Oh! Pierre Parrimore, you shall be made to answer for this!"

"Tut! tut! You talk wild, my child. You well know I have tried to persuade Joe out of the habit!"

Cathie, her face strangely set, and colorless, gazed staringly toward the inanimate form; though great her anguish, it seemed pent up—she was unable to cry out in expression of her acute suffering.

Suddenly, however, she aroused, as if stung by an adder.

"Where is Ford—Ford, and my babe?" she fairly screamed. "Speak! tell me—are they safe? They went for a walk down the gulch!"

"They are not dead!" McClurg, or, more correctly, Pierre Parrimore said, sullenly.

"Not dead! In God's name, father, what do you mean?"

The Southerner gazed at her a moment, half-pityingly, as if he hated to add further to her misery.

"Your husband and babe are not dead," he repeated, "but they might better be, for they have fallen into the hands of one who will show them less mercy than the most bloodthirsty Apache!"

Cathie did not faint, at the terrible words, but her face was so corpse-like, and awful in its look of agony, that even Bird Black averted his gaze, with something like a shudder.

This girl wife did not faint, but there gradually gathered about her colorless lips such an expression of stern resolve, as meant vengeance and death.

"Go on!" she gasped, leaning against the door-post for support. "Go on, Pierre Parrimore. I am prepared even to see the heavens fall!"

A glitter of intense satisfaction crept for an instant into the man's eyes.

"You are no less brave than I expected of you. The blood of the Parrimores never fails to tell when a crisis arrives. But, my child, it is not to you alone that bad news comes, to-day. The news equally concerns me. Daniel Stafford is in this neighborhood, and the vendetta is revived in deadly earnest, and here must be ended. Either the house of Parrimore must perish and pass away, with the blot of disgrace upon the proud old name, or Dan Stafford must die ere he leaves the range!"

Parrimore spoke with a thrilling earnestness that seemed to affect the white-faced child wife in the doorway, for her eyes kindled with a flash of spirit, and a faint glow of color suffused either cheek.

"Who killed Joe?" she asked, with a suddenness, and a forced calmness, that caused Parrimore to give her a sharp glance.

"The vendetta—the tools of Daniel Stafford!" Parrimore hissed, savagely. "The viper dare not come forth and fight his own battle, but has placed the job in the hands of agents. It was one of these who shot Joe. His name was Deadwood Dick."

"My husband—my child? What of them?"

"More I do not know than that Ford Favor and the babe were surrounded by a gang of masked men, and borne away into captivity. That they have fallen into the hands of our foe, there can be no doubt. What will be their fate can but be surmised! We two alone are left to end the vendetta!"

"Then, ended it shall be! I am no child, and can accomplish much. Hear me swear, by the love for my dead brother, yonder, that I will never know peace or rest until the vendetta is ended, and my brother's murder avenged; nor, will I stop at anything that will enhance the success of my trail of vengeance. By the God above me, I swear it!"

"Bravo!" Parrimore cried, with undisguised satisfaction, while Black Bird nodded his approval.

"General Daniel Stafford shall learn to his sorrow that the name of Parrimore shall exist in

triumph, years after he, the last but one of his race, has become food for the worms of the earth. With you to help me, my child, I shall know no fear of defeat!"

The girl did not reply, but turned and entered the cabin.

After a short conversation, Pierre and Bird Black lifted the body of Joe, and carrying it inside, laid it upon a rude lounge.

Parrimore then called to Cathie, but received no answer.

Thinking strange, he opened the door of her room.

She was not there!

Her hat was missing, as were a rifle and belt of small weapons, which usually hung on the wall.

Parrimore turned to his ruffian companion with a chuckle.

"The first hound has started upon the trail!" he said, significantly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GIANT, THE DUDE, AND THE FAKIR.

TWO weeks had passed since the day the citizens of Nowhere had failed to enact summary justice upon Deadwood Dick, and the excitement having greatly decreased, the camp jogged along in the even tenor of its way.

No contradiction had been made by the Governor to the effect that he had not issued the reprieve; hence, there was a strong feeling against him in Nowhere, if nowhere else.

As his term of office would soon expire, he could safely afford to laugh at the adverse opinion of a few scores of miners, while, at the same time, no doubt, he felt justly indignant at the scaly trick played upon him by General Stafford.

The *Nowhere Stuff* had exhausted its editorial afflatus in regard to Deadwood Dick's escape, and yearned for some new "breeze" to spring up, which would give the paper a "boom."

While its editor sat in his office one evening, reflecting upon the uncertainties of life and journalism, Missouri Mag's shebang was the scene of unusual festivities, consequent upon the celebration of Margaret's birthday.

Everybody had been invited, and everybody, literally, was "thar," to do homage to the muscular, and by no means "skeery" proprietress, who took pleasure in announcing upon an illuminated banner, the following:

"THE DAY WE ALL CELEBRATE!"

"Twenty-Seekin Annual Birthday o' Missouri Mag, who runs this hyer meetin'-house. Come in an' spend yer collat. A general fust-class stan'-up-an'-knock-down time may be expected."

What more appetizing invitation need be extended? Sufficient unto the men was Mag's card, and early evening saw the den packed with as motley a gang of roughs as ever assembled beneath a roof.

A band had been provided, and dancing was among the festivities, while cards and whisky did their respective shares toward making a "pleasant time."

Above the bar was conspicuously posted a placard, containing the following suggestive notice:

"P. S.—Missouri Mag's revolvers aire all in trim and she's on the shute!"

This no doubt was intended as a warning for quarrelsome individuals to abstain from deadly target practice; but it was not destined to produce the desired effect, for a man from Trinidad "died with his boots on," as early as nine o'clock in the evening, because he had not the good breeding to invite the crowd up to drink with him.

As this was but a trivial affair, it did not arrest the pleasures of the evening.

About the time things were getting fairly warmed up, a stranger entered the saloon, who at once attracted attention. Not that the arrival of a stranger usually attracted attention, but this one in particular was a little out of the ordinary run of strangers who dropped down in Nowhere.

He was a tall, exceptionally thin, and effeminate-looking young man, who had perhaps reached his twenty-third year, although the only indication of beard upon his face was a soft bit of flaxen down upon his upper lip.

No raw prairie winds or scorching sun had affected his face; in fact, he looked like a sickly plant that had first seen light in an ill-managed hot-house, his features being pinched and wax-like, and devoid of the hue of health.

His garments, of the most fashionable goods, fitted him as tightly as though they had been glued to his anatomy. The daintiest of silk hats sat upon his head; he wore a broad expanse of white shirt, with diamond pin; his feet were

incased in patent-leathers, his hands in laven-der kids, and he carried a dainty gold-headed cane.

The veriest Broadway dude could scarce have surpassed him in style, and it is little wonder that he instantly attracted attention.

The hat, in itself, was sufficient to have "nailed" him, without ceremony; but to-night the men of Nowhere camp seemed bent on having all the fun they could possibly scare up. So the master of ceremonies that evening made no delay in inaugurating the festivities at the expense of that "pilgrim."

This leader of the crowd stood over six feet in his top-boots, and was brawny of limb and broad of chest—a very giant, good for tow hundred and fifty pounds, and possessed of tremendous strength.

His hair and bristling beard were of two color, but he was not an unhandsome man in face.

He was, however, an evident lover of a free fight, and did not care how soon one commenced.

"Some Pumpkins" was the name he had introduced himself by, to the citizens of the camp that afternoon, and it seemed to fit him well, so far as concerned his size.

He had been "hoisting pizen" at the bar, at the time of the entrance of the young stranger, in company with a crowd of miners.

He "downed" the beverage with suddenness, however, at sight of the dude, and drawing a revolver, trotted up to him, with a broad grin of delight.

"Hello! Haow d'ye do, pardner? W'at'll ye take fer the dicer?"

"I do not wish to sell it, sir!" the dude replied, uneasily.

"Oh! ye don't, hey? Waal, now, I wanten buy it jest fer fun."

"But, I tell you, I do not wish to sell it. Must I repeat it?—I do not wish to sell it!"

Some Pumpkins stared; then gave vent to a prolonged whistle, as he glared around at the crowd, comically.

"What's yer name, sonny?" he asked.

"What does that concern you, my man?"

The dude's ire was evidently arising.

"I'll show ye, me milk-sop, if ye don't answer me. My name is Some Pumpkins, from Canaan, an' I'm on the fite. Who air you?"

"Well, sir, if you are really anxious to know, I am St. George Atwood, and I hail from New York. What can I do for you?"

"Give me that hat!"

"What for?"

"To shute."

"You are insulting, sir. I am a gentleman and mind my own business. Did you never learn that accomplishment?"

"I reckon not. I'm a hustler, I am, an' I live on horns an' taller. I want that aire hat an' that aire b'iled shirt. Hey, me lads?"

There was an affirmative murmur from the audience, while a number perpetrated that original Westernism—

"You bet!"

"I give you my hat, sir, and my shirt? Why, what do you take me for?"

"A taller candle wi'out a wick in—a dude!" snorted Some Pumpkins. "What say—do I hev 'em?"

"Most assuredly not! You are highly impudent and insulting. I cannot understand why you thus attempt to create a quarrel with me, when I never did anything to harm you."

"Never did any thing to harm us? Oh! Lordy! Why, me stick o' lemon candy, ye hev nigh 'bout throw'd us inter insulted spasms! Reckon ye don't know our rules o' etterket, hey?"

"I do not."

"Waal, as a gin'ral thing, we shoot a man on ther spot who simply sports a dicer."

"You do?"

"You bet! When a man dares ter insult our rules o' etterket by wearin' a b'iled shirt, we plants him alive."

"Indeed!"

"Fact! Considerin' that ye warn't fetched up wi' good breedin', I let ye off easy by jest axin' ye to pony up the offensive articles."

"And I, like a gentleman's son, refuse to do so!"

"Ye do?"

"Most assuredly."

Some Pumpkins regarded young Atwood for a moment as if he could not believe the evidence of his senses; then he raised his revolver, and leveled it at the plucky dude.

"Off with the hat, or I'll shute it!" he commanded, with a savage oath.

"Blaze away!" was the cool answer.

At this invitation the click! click! of two

score revolvers was heard simultaneously, and a volley of bullets sped likewise at the offending hat.

It was blown from the head of young Atwood, and fell to the floor, literally shot into fragments.

"Now then, off wi' ther shirt or die!" Some Pumpkins cried fiercely.

Atwood was now pale with affright.

He had evidently regarded the giant's threat before as a joke.

With nervous haste he began to remove his outer garments.

First came a coat, then a vest; then, lo! and behold! a corset of pink satin met the gaze of the astonished audience.

A roar of laughter escaped the crowd, while Some Pumpkins actually seemed too astounded to speak for the moment.

"Corsets!" he finally gasped. "Boyees, this aire too much fer mortal man to endure. Fetch a rope, some one; quick, afore it escapes!"

A yell of assent burst from a score of throats, and several men sprung away in quest of the desired rope with which to lynch the man who had dared to insult the town by appearing in it wearing a corset.

But, just then, and ere the required rope was produced, a man stepped forward from a neighboring card-table, where he had been engaged, both in watching the game and this Canaan giant.

"See here, my friend!" he said, confronting the latter, "this little circus of yours has gone about far enough. You let the stranger alone, or you will most likely get hurt."

Some Pumpkins glared upon the speaker in astonishment, while the crowd gave muttered utterances to their surprise.

"I'll git hurt, hey?" he ejaculated. "I'll git all broke up of a sudden, like I was no good for anything?"

"Without the slightest doubt!"

Then turning to young Atwood, the stranger continued:

"As for you, young fellow, if you value your skin get up and dust out of here!"

The unfortunate dude needed no second invitation, and succeeded in making his escape from the saloon.

When he was gone the stranger once more turned his attention to the giant, who had as yet not recovered sufficiently from his surprise to assume a warlike attitude.

"There!" the intruder exclaimed. "Your victim is gone. Now, what have you got to say about it?"

"What hev I got to say?" the giant muttered, rubbing his hand across his eyes, as if to make sure that he saw aright. Why—

He didn't finish the sentence.

He remained standing in an awkward sort of position, and stared into vacancy.

"Come!" the stranger called out; "I thought you was on your muscle. Ain't you going to knock me down, or bite off my ear?"

No answer.

The rough crowd stared first at the giant and then at the stranger in undisguised wonderment.

What was the matter with Some Pumpkins was more than they were capable of comprehending.

The stranger regarded him intently for several seconds, as if waiting for him to speak; then, with a dry laugh, he pointed toward the floor.

"This Sierra bear will show you how to waltz, grizzly fashion!" he said.

And Some Pumpkins did that very thing!

He got down on all-fours, and proceeded to perform an impromptu series of whirls and twists and evolutions that were ridiculously uncouth and ludicrous.

"Good enough!" the stranger said. "By the way, gents, let me introduce myself. I am known best as Fakir Fred, from the fact that I am always faking up some kind of a racket for the edification of those mortals who appreciate a bit of fun. Lo! and behold, the raging and gigantic epidemic, that a bit ago threatened to uproot this town is now as meek as a lamb, and twice as natural. To show you that Some Pumpkins is really an obliging gentleman, even at the expense of personal pain, I'll ask him to place his back up against yonder wall, while I give you a few tricks of my trade."

The giant slowly arose, and as slowly backed up to the wall.

"Good! Now shift your head, so that your left ear rests flat against that projecting stud-ding!" Fakir Fred said, calmly.

The giant obeyed.

He still gazed into vacancy; his face was

strangely set; he seemed to be worked by some invisible mechanism.

Not knowing whether to laugh, or not, the crowd of spectators looked on, their countenances furnishing wide contrasts in their expressions.

"Now, then," Fakir Fred went on, "you have witnessed how ready the fellow is to obey my slightest wish, which all goes to prove, conclusively, that he knows his master when he meets him; so, to amuse you, I'll just prick his ear with a knife-blade, and you will see how serenely he takes it. I do really believe he will laugh."

Drawing a knife from the top of his boot, the fakir suddenly raised his arm, and the blade went whizzing through the air.

A cry of astonishment went up, as the keen point just touched Some Pumpkins's ear, and was imbedded in the wood.

Did the giant cry out with pain, or fright?

Far from it! A smile mantled his features, as he reached up, pulled out the knife and tossed it back to the fakir.

"There's grit for you!" that individual cried, blandly. "Our overgrown friend would make a brave soldier, if he only had the proper coaching. Now, the next act on our programme, will be something else. To illustrate one of the uncertainties of life, will some one loan my friend a cigar that is nearly smoked up but has ashes on the end of it?"

The cigar was handed to the giant.

It was about an inch and a half long, a quarter of an inch of it being reduced to ashes.

"Now place the right end between your teeth, and turn your face sideways!" Fakir Fred ordered.

Some Pumpkins obeyed, his face wearing a look of stolid composure.

Fakir Fred then took the tip of the knife between his thumb and forefinger, and then it went, with a whiz through the air, and when the blade clipped off the end of the cigar, close to the giant's lips, a thunder of applause made the building tremble.

A quiet smile of satisfaction from the Fakir—then, he said:

"Now, then, gents, having restored things to good order, I'll endeavor to apologize for detaining you so long. Will you step up and take a drink, at my expense, while Mr. Some Pumpkins is performing a few feats of gymnastics?"

There was an immediate rush to the bar, and for several minutes Missouri Mag was kept busy in serving out the beverages.

In the mean time, the giant had suddenly developed himself into a gymnast of no mean ability, and was turning somersets, and doing other bits of circus "biz" much to the delight and wonderment of the gaping crowd.

In the midst of this fun it was that a deeply-veiled woman, dressed in black, stepped up to Fakir Fred, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"You are a mesmerist and a magician, Mr. Fakir!" she said, in a soft, significant voice.

"Are you so much of a magician with the pasteboards that you would dare to venture all your money on a game of draw?"

He started, a trifle, and gazed at her, a moment, curiously, as if trying to see the face, so closely hidden behind the veil.

"With you?" he asked, dryly.

"Exactly—with me."

"Well, I don't know that I should be so impolite as to refuse to accommodate you. My exchequer is rather depleted, to-night, however. A hundred would be my limit."

"Enough! Come along. Even men of magic sometimes get beaten;" and turning, she led the way toward a card-table.

"Pumpkins, you can go and stand up in yonder corner until I want you!" Fakir Fred remarked, commandingly; then he joined his unknown challenger, at the table.

CHAPTER X.

LADYSLIPPER.

SOME PUMPKINS promptly obeyed Fakir Fred's order, and looked as docile and resigned as a person could well look, under the most agreeable circumstances.

Little attention was paid to him, however, for all interest was centered upon the card duel between Fakir Fred, and the Veiled Lady, whom nobody appeared to know.

The game between the Veiled Lady and the Fakir promised to be of more than usual interest, especially as the former had been the challenger.

A large number of those present did not understand the meaning of the terms "mesmerist" and "magician," consequently the Veiled Lady's reference to the Fakir created but little excitement.

A crowd gathered about the table.

"You can call me Ladyslipper, if you have occasion to call me anything!" the veiled woman said, producing a fresh pack of cards. "I presume you were joking about your limit being a hundred dollars."

"Not at all," Fakir Fred replied, calmly. "Did you mistake me for a peregrinating goldmine? If so, you are not remarkable for your penetration."

"Well, we will play for your hundred. I have an inordinate curiosity, to see how well you handle the pasteboards!"

"Your curiosity shall be gratified," Fred said, dryly. "I will prove to you that I am no adept at cards, even though I be a mesmerist and magician."

The money was staked, and the game begun, and quickly it was plain to those who looked on, that Fakir Fred was in no wise particular whether he won, or not, as he played carelessly, while on the other hand, the Veiled Lady played watchfully, cautiously.

A grunt of surprise went around, when the Fakir ran the game out, and raked in the stakes.

"Humph!" Ladyslipper said, coolly. "I see you can play, but, although I am not a professional, I came here, to-night for a purpose. Put up your two hundred dollars and I will cover it. If you lose, you are to remove your wig and false beard!"

Fakir Fred did not start. Outwardly he was calm; the words of the mysterious gambler did not affect him.

"Indeed?" he said, quietly. "If you lose—" "I remove my vail!"

"Even so; but what will that benefit me?"

"You will know me, when you see me again. If you lose, it will benefit me, considerably, to know whether you are the person I think you are, or not!"

"Who do you think I am?"

"The man whom I have sworn to kill! I prefer not to mention names until after we play, as you might not be the one I suspect, and it might make things unpleasant for you."

"Ah!"

"If I lose, we will then play again, without my being satisfied as to your identity."

"What will be the stakes, then?"

"Your life against mine—the winner to 'rake' the stakes from across this table!"

A murmur of surprise escaped the audience, while Fakir Fred picked up the cards, and carelessly shuffled them.

"Then I can naturally look upon you as my enemy?"

"Yes. Will you play?"

"Cert! Cut for deal."

Thicker and more dense grew the crowd around the table, proving that the interest was increasing.

The game began with Ladyslipper leading, but, play as carefully and judiciously as she could, it seemed as if it were fated she should not win—for the Fakir won the game with comparative ease.

A revolver—a small but magnificent weapon—was in his hand, as he slapped down the last card upon the table.

How it had got there, the lookers-on were unable to say, unless it had slid down into his hand from his sleeve.

"You are to remove your vail, are you not?" the Fakir asked, with quiet triumph. "I am somewhat anxious to get an unobstructed view of the apparition of loveliness who wants to convert me into a cadaver!"

An exclamation of impatience escaped the Ladyslipper.

"What can it benefit you to see my face?" she cried, gathering up the cards.

"Oh! not much; only I'll know you the next time I meet you."

"We shall not be likely to meet again, after we get through here. But, look if you want to!"

Her white right hand lifted the vail, for an instant, and then let it fall again.

But a brief glimpse it was that any one got of the fair girlish face.

No expression on the part of Fakir Fred, went to show that he was in the least affected at what he saw.

"I never met you before to my knowledge," he said, "and therefore am at loss to comprehend why you should cherish ill-will. Might I ask you to explain?"

"I will explain nothing. I have my purpose, and I mean to fulfill it. We will now play the deciding game. If I win, I am to have the privilege of shooting you through the heart. If you win, you have a like oppor-

tunity for satisfaction. Is this satisfactory to you?"

Fakir Fred uttered a peculiar chuckle.

"Well, as you appear to be transacting all the business, I suppose I shall have to acquiesce, or else show a white headlight. Produce a fresh deck, and we will play. I assure you, however, beforehand, that I do not intend to lose this time, for I think it necessary that I should hang out here below for several fortnights yet to come."

"That remains to be seen," was the terse answer, as Ladyslipper laid a jeweled six-shooter upon the table at her right.

The cards were produced, and the game began.

Around the table a peculiar silence marked the moment; every one breathlessly awaited the result.

Was it fate again?

There was an exasperated cry directly; Fakir Fred had won again!

"Magician! devil! you have won, but you shall not triumph!" the defeated card-queen cried fiercely. "Behold! men, that man is Deadwood Dick!"

She had, by an agile and unexpected movement, torn away a false beard from the fakir's face even as she spoke, and—

The handsome countenance of the road-agent Apollo was revealed!

CHAPTER XI.

CATHIE'S VENGEANCE.

CLEAR and distinct the words of the card-queen rang out.

For an instant a dead silence ensued. It seemed as if the rough crowd was, for the time being, electrified.

Deadwood Dick was the first to speak, or move. He leaned over the table, his hand clutching his revolver, his eyes gleaming as they had never gleamed before.

"This is one I owe you!" he hissed, so fiercely that it caused her to step back. "You are a woman, or I'd kill you where you stand!"

Then with a quick leap he landed upon the table; then a flying leap carried him over the heads of the crowd, and Deadwood Dick was out of the saloon, in the darkness of the night, ere a hand could be raised to prevent his marvelous escape.

Then, when it was too late, a vengeful yell followed, and an outpouring of the citizens into the street ensued.

Curses and howls of disappointed rage made the night hideous, but they were uttered in vain; for Deadwood Dick had effectually disappeared ere a search had fairly got started.

And when they came to look for the Ladyslipper, she, too, had vanished!

Whether or not she had gone in search of Deadwood Dick no one could say.

Ladyslipper had not gone in pursuit of the ex-road-prince, although she lost no time in hurrying out of town after Dick's escape.

A brisk walk down the gulch brought her to a dark transverse ravine, which she entered fearlessly, and followed until she came to an old hut, which had no appearance of being tenanted.

When she rapped on the door, however, it was opened, and she was admitted to a dimly-lighted room, whose furnishings were of the most primitive order.

A cheery fire was burning in the fire-place, and within the glow of the light four men were seated.

One was Pierre Parrimore, another was Black Bird, and the other individuals were no less personages than Sis Soaker and his friend, O'Gall.

The quartette were actively engaged in smoking, when the young card-queen entered, but paused long enough to remove the pipes, and give her an inquiring stare.

She threw aside the vail and hat she had worn and came into the light—not Ladyslipper, now, but Cathie!

Pierre Parrimore gave vent to a grunt, as he pushed forward a stool.

"Well?" he demanded gruffly. "How did you make out?"

"All in vain!" Cathie replied, her eyes flashing. "Didn't I warn you that would be the way of it?"

"Did you find the tiger, then?"

"Yes. He was masquerading as Fakir Fred, a magician. I drew him into a game of cards, and lost the money you gave me. I then staked my life against his, and—"

"Won!" eagerly—almost wolfishly.

"By no means. He won, and held my life in his hands. Seeing no better plan, I tore the

beard from his face and betrayed his identity, expecting the crowd would pounce upon him, and prevent his escape. Instead of that, he leaped clear over their heads, and was gone, ere an effort could be made to stop him!"

"Ten thousand devils! Why did ye let him escape, curse ye?"

"I could not help it. He had me covered, until he made that astonishing leap. It took me so by surprise that I could not act ere he was gone."

"Just about as I thought. Did you see any one that looked like Daniel Stafford?"

"No. I am satisfied he is not in the town. If in the vicinity, he is undoubtedly hiding, like yourselves."

Parrimore was silent for several minutes, his face dark and scowling.

"I see that I've got to take the matter more thoroughly in my own hands if I want to succeed in ending the accursed vendetta. What did you learn in regard to Stafford's girl?"

"Very little. She has been to the town several times, making quiet inquiries for her father, but learning nothing of him, goes away again."

"By stage?"

"Yes."

"She undoubtedly hangs out in some of the adjoining camps. If we could get possession of her, we would stand some better show of getting your baby and Ford free."

"Would to Heaven there were some way of liberating them, if they still live. I have but little hopes that they do."

"It may be that they don't; but it is not always best to give up hope too soon. You had better return to the other place now, for it is getting late. You can come down in the morning, and perhaps I shall have succeeded in arranging some new plan of action. You are not afraid to go alone? If you are, I will send Bird with you."

"You needn't trouble yourself!" the girl responded, haughtily. "I do not need an escort."

She quitted the hut hastily, evidently fearing that Black Bird would attempt to follow her.

An hour later, she stood beside a mound, but recently made, in the little fir-fringed yard of their mountain home.

Flowers had been planted upon the grave of poor Joe. Cathie's hands had planted them there.

She knelt beside the mound now, and buried her face in her hands, while her figure trembled with the emotion she tried to restrain.

"Oh! why am I not dead, too?" she moaned, piteously. "Why did I not die when I was a child, and save all this misery—this living death?"

Further words she did not utter just then, but wept quietly to herself, unaware that she was watched.

A man had stepped from around one corner of the cabin, and stood gazing at her intently—a man, roughly dressed, and from whose face a heavy beard had recently been cropped, leaving a rough, grizzled stubble, which was anything but becoming to the otherwise good-looking, intelligent face.

In short, it was General Stafford, but so changed that few would have recognized him in his present appearance, as the stately gentleman who had a few weeks before arrived in Nowhere Camp, in company with Governor Snelling.

His expression was grave and sad, as he stood watching Cathie, but from his eyes emanated a wild gleam, that could belong only to the eyes of a man whose mind was greatly perturbed.

He appeared to be listening as well as watching, as if expecting to hear the mourning girl speak; nor was he destined to be disappointed.

"Yes!" she suddenly cried, fiercely, "he is dead, and no grief of mine can recall him to life. I live—must live, for the Bible teaches that it is a sin to commit suicide; but I shall live for vengeance. Oh, Pierre Parrimore, you are a coward, but your child is not! I will end the vendetta, and that, too, ere many suns more have set. Joe shall be avenged—I swear it by all I hold sacred!"

General Stafford started, eagerly, as the words reached his hearing. He took a step forward.

"Great Heaven! it is true—I cannot be mistaken!" he gasped, his breath coming quick and fast. "Bijou! Bijou!"

With wonderful alacrity, Cathie sprang to her feet, and faced him, her face white, her eyes fairly blazing.

"Hal! who are you?" she cried, fiercely; then, she reeled back a pace, and glared wildly at him, as if she recognized the face.

"My child—my long-lost child!" the general cried, springing forward; but it was only to pause, when he saw a revolver muzzle staring him in the face.

"Stop!" Cathie cried. "A step further, and I will send a bullet through your brain. What are you doing here?"

"What? God only knows. Fate directed my footsteps hither—to find you. Bijou—oh! Heaven, can it be you have forgotten me, your own father?"

"My father—you my father, Daniel Stafford? Oh! no! Once I knew you as such, 'tis true, but I was young, then, and knew nothing of the past, when you tore me from my mother's breast when I was but a babe!"

"'Tis false—false as—"

"Stop! stop! I say. Do not dare to deny it, for it is useless. I am not your child, but your enemy to the death. Hear me, sir—the proud blood of the Parrimores courses through my veins—the vendetta blood of my fathers. I have sworn to avenge my young brother's death—there he lies—and, at the same time forever end the vendetta. Your coming has given me my chance. It shall not be the pleasure of my parent to kill the last Stafford, but mine!"

With terrible earnestness she spoke, and her hand clutched the revolver with a fierce grip.

General Stafford comprehended all: Pierre Parrimore had poisoned her mind—had taught her that she was a Parrimore, and that it was her duty to take up the vendetta.

It was a horrible realization to the proud old Southerner; the awful fact fairly stunned him, for the moment.

Cathie continued, ere he could speak:

"There lies my brother—another example of the wolf's ferocity, and you the wolf. You had one of your accomplices shoot him down who never did you a wrong. I swore to avenge his death. I am going to do it, to-night, while I have the chance. You shall never leave this place alive, Daniel Stafford!"

"Child! child! for God's sake listen. I am your father, and you are looking to the wrong man. Pierre Parrimore never was married, and is but using you to secure the accomplishment of his evil designs. I can prove this beyond the shadow of a doubt. Your brother was my own son, and I had no knowledge of his death until just now, nor did my accomplices, as you term them, do ought to harm him. In the name of the Almighty, I swear that what I say is true, and you are my long-lost child, whom Pierre Parrimore stole from my home."

"I do not believe it. No protestations on your part can change my mind. You have run into my power, and the vendetta shall be ended to-night. Coward and wretch that you are, you would perjure your soul to save your own worthless life, but it will avail you nothing. I am Cathie Parrimore, and I will end the vendetta! Tell me, sir, where are my husband and child?"

"Your husband—your child?"

"Yes, my husband and my child—they whom your tools—Deadwood Dick and his outlaw band—abducted and bore away into the mountains?"

"No such a thing has occurred! I swear to it by the honor of a Stafford. Pierre Parrimore has played his cards well, but every word he has told you is a base—a damnable lie!"

"Tell me, General Stafford, I command you—is my husband and child alive?"

"I know nothing about them—never knew until now, that you were married. Believe me, or not, this is God's own truth—I swear it!"

"It is useless—all your oaths would not make me believe you. If they are dead, or alive, it cannot change my resolve in regard to you. With your death, the vendetta of years ends, and you die to-night!"

"You reckon wrongly if you believe that," he cried. "My death does not end the matter!"

"Bah! who else remains except your daughter? She would faint at a pistol-shot!"

"Don't believe anything of the kind. She at least is a Stafford, even if you are changed. Then, too, when I die, you will find that a worse enemy to the accursed Parrimores race still lives!"

"Who?"

"Deadwood Dick!"

"His days, too, are numbered. But, stop! this delay is useless. You die to-night. I will give you the choice of two fates. Yonder is the canyon cliff. If you prefer to leap into the abyss to being shot down where you stand, it is your privilege. I have the drop on you, and you know I am a dead shot, for it was you who

taught me. Decide! You have but two minutes in which to decide!"

Her hand was outstretched, and wavered not as she leveled the revolver at his heart.

Her purpose was fixed, and Stafford well realized that she would keep her word.

Should he allow his own child to shoot him down, and thus add an awful crime to her young, misguided soul? No—by Heaven, no! he inwardly vowed. He would take the risk of the leap; that would be his own deliberate act.

He turned and walked deliberately toward the cliff.

Cathie followed him, keeping him covered.

He reached the edge of the canyon.

Without looking backward he bounded outward; the fearful leap was made.

CHAPTER XII.

PARRIMORE'S SCHEME.

At the old hut in the ravine, after the departure of Cathie, a temporary silence prevailed, as the men refilled and resumed their pipes.

It was finally broken by Pierre Parrimore.

"Well, another day is passed, and nothing accomplished!" he growled. "If the gal had killed the accursed road-agent we would be largely ahead of the field. We must arouse into immediate action, for I'm tired of depending on the girl. Then, too, the boys are getting impatient because I don't set them to work, and if I don't look out there will directly be an open revolt among them. If I am not mistaken, there is a general regret, already, that they left Deadwood Dick's employ and leadership."

"You can easily overcome that, by flinging out a little collat!" Black Bird suggested, significantly.

"Perhaps; but that sort of thing don't pay, when everything is out-go, and no income. I think, however, I shall set 'em onto the stage to-morrow night, be the profits what they may. It will keep them a little better in spirit. And, now, Soaker, as there is no prospect that you and O'Gall will be needed, to-night, you can return, and keep an eye on things at Nowhere. If anything of importance occurs, you will of course notify me."

"Kerect!" Soaker replied. "I suppose you're goin' to give us a bracer afore we amble, eh?"

"Coffound it, you'll bankrupt me, with your appetite for drink. There's the jug, yonder. Be sure and don't swallow it!"

With alacrity both bums made a dive for the jug, but Soaker won the first drink and swallowed a full half-pint of the burning "tanglefoot." O'Gall had to be content with what was left—for between the two of them, they managed to drain the jug!

Then, with grins of satisfaction, they departed leaving Parrimore and Black Bird to themselves.

"D'ye take much stock in them bums?" the latter growled, gazing dolefully at the empty jug.

"Only so much that they are useful in bringing us news, from the town," Pierre replied.

"They're not sharp enough to be capable of any great villainy I fancy."

"I ain't so sure about that," Bird protested.

"We'd feel cheap if they'd spring a trap on us."

"Pooh! no fear of that. Keep 'em in whisky, and they're no solid. To business. It is time my agent got back, from the South. He is liable to arrive at any minute, and we must be prepared to meet him."

"Who is he?"

"A big galoot I found in Canaan. He was broke, and I coached him up, and sent him South on the mission. He rejoices, up in these parts, in the name of Some Pumpkins."

"Ah! I've heard of him."

"No doubt. Most every one has. He's said to be some on the fight."

"What did you send him South for?"

"I'll explain. This girl Cathie, as I have once before told you, is the daughter of my foe, Dan Stafford. A rich relative on her mother's side died, lately, and left a large fortune to the girl, in spot cash, which was to be handed over to her, on demand at any time after she reached her sixteenth birthday."

"Ah! what amount?"

"A cool hundred thousand."

"Indeed! She's a prize, then."

"Of course. That is why I had her husband, and the kid, spirited away."

"Ah! I see. You propose to gobble up the turkey, yourself?"

"Well, I should smile!"

"What did you send Some Pumpkins South, for?"

"To look into the matter, and see what could be done about it. He wrote me back that everything was all O. K., and all there was to do was

for me to produce the girl—I fixed up as her father—and the money would be paid to me as her rightful guardian."

"Then, what?"

"That didn't suit me. In behalf of the girl, I wrote to the party holding the money, and proposed to him that he send a messenger back, with Pumpkins, fetching the money, and pay the stuff to the girl here, thereby saving her a tiresome journey."

"This was agreed to, I 'spose."

"Yes. When Some Pumpkins arrives he will fetch the messenger and the swag with him."

"I suppose you will give it right over to the girl?"

"Do I look like a fool? I reckon not! We must interview this messenger, and obtain the money, and then, put him out of the way. If any blame or suspicion is attached to any one, Dan Stafford and Some Pumpkins will get it. If the latter shows any signs of croaking, we'll spin his top, too."

"How much do I get?"

"Oh! be easy about that. I'll not be stingy with you, if you help me out. You will make more by working for me than for any one else."

"That's what I'm dependin' on!" Black Bird replied, pointedly. "If you treat me wi' a squar' deal, I'm as good as a First National Bank; ef ye don't I'm as wicked as a mule in fly time."

"You will have no occasion to be wicked," Parrimore added, carelessly, although it was evident the words of the ruffian did not conduce to his perfect ease of mind. "You can now go to Nowhere, and see if the giant has arrived—for something seems to tell me that he has!"

"I will save you that trouble," a voice cried, and the door opened, and Some Pumpkins stepped into the hut, his face wearing its usual broad grin.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE VENDETTA IS NOT YET ENDED."

DEADWOOD DICK, as we have seen, was not followed by Cathie when he made his escape from the mining-town; but he was followed, nevertheless.

Of this fact he was not aware, for some time, as he did not look back. He was, in fact, nearly a mile from Nowhere ere he made the discovery, through the distinct sound of a cough reaching his hearing.

He instantly wheeled about, his hand grasping a pistol.

A few feet away he saw, through the dim light, a woman advancing toward him.

A glance was sufficient to convince him that it was not the card-queen whom he had just escaped.

Keeping his weapon ready in case of necessity, he allowed her to come still nearer, until she halted of her own accord.

"Well," he asked, dryly, "what may be your object in dogging my footsteps?"

"I wish to speak to you, sir!" was the reply; and lifting her veil, she turned her face toward him, revealing herself to be Stella Stafford.

"Do you know me?"

"I fancy I have not that honor," he replied more courteously, for he at once divined that she was a lady of refinement. "You are a stranger around these parts, I take it."

"I am; and some impulse I cannot account for told me that by an interview with you I could learn something I am very anxious to know."

"Indeed! May I ask what it is and who you are?"

"I am Stella Stafford, and I am in search of my father, Daniel Stafford. Do you know of his whereabouts, or am I wrong in supposing you to be Deadwood Dick?"

"You are wrong in neither case, my dear lady. I am Deadwood Dick, and I do know where the general is. We two have become allies for the purpose of ending the vendetta, and your father thought it best to keep you in ignorance of his whereabouts until a victory had been achieved."

"It is very unkind of him. I have been greatly distressed through not being able to learn anything concerning him. I trust now that you will take me to him."

"I am very sorry, Miss Stafford, but I cannot do so without first obtaining his permission."

"But I say you must! There is no possible way of your getting out of it!"

"I do not understand."

"Everywhere you go, I go!"

"Ah!"

"Yes, where you go I go, until I find my father. It's an old saying that 'when a woman

says she will, she will, and that's the end of it." So you know what you have to expect."

Dick could not repress a smile, while at the same time he felt annoyed.

If she insisted, how was he to prevent her from following him? True, he could take to his heels and run away from her, but that would be unmanly.

"You had better consider your father's wishes, Miss Stafford," he said. "You return to Nowhere, and remain at the hotel, until I see the general. If he grants the permission, I will at once come for you and conduct you to his presence."

"Oh, no! I prefer to go now. So when you get ready to move on, I will follow."

"Then, I have but one other course, besides allowing you to accompany me!"

"What is that?"

"To get rid of you by shooting you!"

"Of course you can do that; but I fancy you are too honorable a man for such a crime."

"You are right. I acknowledge that, if you refuse to return to Nowhere, I am fairly beaten."

"Well, I do refuse."

"Then, come along. I shall not be responsible for the general's displeasure, however."

He continued on his journey, and Stella walked quietly by his side.

After fully three miles had been covered, they turned from the main gulch into a narrow dark cut—a long, forbidding opening, which seemed as if it might have been the work of an earthquake, that had rent the mountain asunder.

Far above the jagged rocks could be traced, dimly outlined, against the sky.

"You had best take my hand, going through the pass," Dick said, "for it is very rough."

She did so, and they continued on.

It was indeed a dark, terrible place, and they had gone no great distance when Dick suddenly came to a stand-still.

"Sh!" he cautioned. "I thought I heard a groan."

"So did I!" Stella replied.

They listened, intently.

A moment later, they distinctly heard a groan—that, evidently, of some one in distress, not far ahead.

"Come! we will investigate!" Dick said. "It sounds like a familiar voice."

They soon reached a spot, where a man's body was lying among the rocks.

"By Heaven! it is the general!" escaped Dick's lips.

It was indeed the general, whom Cathie had forced to leap over the precipice, far above.

He was not unconscious, for he recognized Dick and Stella at once.

"Oh! I'm better than a dozen dead men, yet, and the vendetta is not ended," he gasped.

The general, strange to relate, was not dangerously injured, only his hip was dislocated and his body covered with bruises.

A net-work of vines growing with rank luxuriance from one side of the cliff had sensibly broken the force of his fall; otherwise he would have been crushed into a shapeless mass.

Handy at anything, Dick was not long in getting the general comfortably over his shoulder; then the journey was continued, and in due time a mountain pocket was reached, where was a single rude cabin, which some sanguine prospector had built and deserted.

Being something of a surgeon, Dick soon restored the hip-joint to its socket, and dressed his wounds, and ere long had him feeling comfortable.

The general then related in detail the substance of what had happened on the mountain-side.

"It is strange!" Dick said. "Pierre Parrimore must have a singular influence over your daughter if, indeed, she it was whom you encountered."

"There can be no doubt but that it was my lost daughter. And, as you say, it seems a hopeless task to attempt to convince her that she is not his daughter, or my enemy."

"She came near getting me in a tight fix!" Dick said, grimly. "Henceforth you and Miss Stafford must remain here, and I will watch this pretty avenger, and through doing so, learn where Parrimore is quartered. If I catch him it will be all day with him, if you but say the word."

"What else can I do? He is a bad man, and in my present condition I could not meet him successfully."

"Then I will undertake the job of settling the business!"

The next hour saw the intrepid rover on his way back to Nowhere.

Upon his shoulders he had taken a heavy responsibility—avenging another man's spite.

Then, too, he personally owed Parrimore a grudge for causing a mutiny of Dick's band, and thus betraying his trust.

CHAPTER XIV.

PUMPKINS HOLDS THE DROP!

THE faces of Pierre Parrimore and Black Bird did not express the utmost satisfaction, as the giant, Some Pumpkins, strode unceremoniously into their presence.

Was it because of the giant's imposing appearance, or did his sudden coming interfere with their villainous plans?

"Haow d'ye do, pilgrims?" Some Pumpkins saluted, closing the door, and straddling the only chair the place afforded. "I rather opine ye warn't expectin' this hyer bloomin' zephyr to waft in, just at the present minnit?"

"No, we were not expecting you, here, although I had an idea that you might have arrived in Nowhere. We were just speaking about you!" Parrimore allowed.

"So I am aware!" the giant chuckled. "As the eaves of this palatial abode war too low to let me in, wi'out stoopin' I natterally had to eavesdrop, an' heard some conversation, quite interestin' to me!"

Parrimore and Black Bird exchanged quick glances.

Some Pumpkins was watching them, narrowly, and something gleamed for an instant in his clinched palm.

"Yas, I war highly edderfied at what I heard, ye know!" Pumpkins went on, "an' I thort I'd drap in and see ef I c'u'd git an approximut idea of how soon you propose to spin my top!"

"You may git it spun sooner than you think for if you get too fresh!" Parrimore growled. "What brings you here?"

"Business, o' course. Hain't ye glad ter feast yer optics on my bloomin' phiz, or hain't ye, now?"

"It matters not whether I am, or am not. When did you get back?"

"This evenin', jest in time, as usual, ter draw a prize. D'ye see this hyer souse?"

And he exhibited the ear, still bleeding, at which Fakir Fred had hurled the knife.

"Yes. How did you get that cut?"

"Why, jest as simple, and easy, like, as rollin' off a log. I waltzed inter a saloon, ter hev sum fun, an' war just startin' up a quiet quadrille at ther expense of a dude, when a stranger lipped in, an' all of a sudden I hed nothin' ter say, like I war a spanked school-boy. Whatever he told me to say or do, I war obligin' enuff to do, like sum ignerant gawk, an' when he told me to put my ear ag'in' a beam a let him fling a knife thru it, did I refnse? No sir-ee—not fer Joseph! I jest war as accommodatin' as a fly in dorg-time, I war. An' when the galoot told me to go stand myself up in a corner, ter repentant a statter o' the Goddess o' Liberty, did I do thet? Waal, ye kin jest bet yer best billed shirt I did!"

"What then?"

"Waal, I stood thar, like an ungumptified lummix, until the fellar played keerds wi' a she-male, an' she snatched a false beard off him, an' he lit out like a demoralized hornet in a Turkish bath. Then, I felt like myself, once more, and I folded my tent and, like the Arab, betook myself hence. An' good fortune, together wi' a befogged brain, fetched me hyar!"

"I see into it," Parrimore said, turning to Black Bird. "I have heard that the cuss, Deadwood Dick, possesses almost miraculous mesmerism powers—in fact, seemed possessed of the devil, in more senses than one—and it is evident he's been having some fun, at our friend's expense."

"Rather a bad go, ain't it?" the ruffian said, significantly.

"Curse it, yes—that is, if he has in any way become possessed of the truth."

"Ye needn't feel oneasy on that score!" Some Pumpkins spoke up. "He didn't ax me nothin' consarnin' our bizness."

"Ah! that alters the case, then. Well, what have you to report?"

The giant grinned.

"D'ye see any green in either of my eyes?" he demanded, a cunning glimmer perceptible in them. "Do I look like a galoot as was brought up on canary-bird seed, or fish-balls—which?"

"You act like an infernal idiot!" Parrimore retorted. "Come down to business, now, and no more dilly-dallying! Did the messenger accompany you?"

"Waal, I should ker-squeeze not!"

"What?"

"You heard me!"

"Confound you, explain yourself."

"Easy enuff. The messenger tuk a shorter route, and arrived in Nowhere before I did."

"How was that?"

"Oh! I reckon my *spirituelle* appearance didn't impress 'em favorably, an' they calkylated the messenger would be safer, ef he traveled alone."

"Ha! Wary, and suspicious, eh? No doubt your infernal blundering was the cause of it!"

"Nary a bit! Besides, you made one leetle mistake, me friend. The fortin' war left to Estelle B. Stafford, and not Bijou Stafford, which considerably alters the complexion of the case, ye see!"

"You lie, curse you—you lie!" Pierre Parrimore cried, furiously.

"Look out!" and Some Pumpkins looked ugly. "Kinder muzzle some o' thet sort o' flattery, ef ye don't wanter hev daylight let thr'u' yer skull. Although I'm a livin' exemplification o' George Washingtonism, I ain't purtic'ler good tempered 'bout this hour o' night, an' ye might arouse me to dangerousness. What I sed is Gospel fac!"

"Well, what did you do about it?"

"What did I do? Waal, I squirmed an' twisted an' wriggled the thing around, 'til I got the executor ter believe that Estelle B. Stafford an' Bijou were one an' the same, an' that there weren't no other children. So, I got that much fixed, an' the messenger war sent."

"I suppose, of course, you would know the man if you were to meet him?" Pierre Parrimore demanded eagerly.

"Dunno how, 'cause I warn't given a peep at him. He was to meet me in Nowhere, and make hisself known to me by uttering a certain word."

"Ah! what word?"

Some Pumpkins grinned more broadly than ever.

"That's just what I happen to know, an' you don't," he answered, with a chuckle. "Ye see, it ain't allers advisable ter spin a top until the string aire all unwound."

"Curse you! do you mean to play me false?" Parrimore roared, in a fearful rage. "If you do, you'll find out your mistake. Tell me that word, or I swear you shall never leave this place alive!"

"I sha'n't, hey?"

"You shall not!"

"Who's goin' ter hinder me?" And a wicked glitter entered the eyes of the big man from Canaan. "If thar's sech a thing as snow in winter-time, just so sure hev I got the drap!"

And accompanying the declaration, the giant's two arms suddenly shot out, and each hand grasped a cocked revolver.

"Hey! what yer say?" he cried, rising to his feet. "Spin my royal top, hey? Pick up this hyer pilgrim fer a flat, will ye, an' then calckulate ter plant him, will ye? Waal, I should reckon *not*! When ye want ter know what that leetle word aire jest hunt me up an' soothe my itching palm wi' a ten-thousand-dollar note; *then* I'll tell you, and not until then. So, adieu, my tulips—my pinks—my peonies—adieu; and when distant yards of *terra firma* divide us, pray remember that though somewhat undergrown for my age, I am still Some Pumpkins, and not as big a fool as I look!"

And with a mocking bow he backed to the door, keeping the two ruffians covered as he went.

To open the door and leap out into the black night, was but the work of a moment.

"Come!" Pierre Parrimore cried, when he was gone. "That devil must die before he is seen by the messenger!"

CHAPTER XV.

ANOTHER STRONG MOVE.

"THE messenger must not meet the giant!" Parrimore gritted, as they ran, his breath short and quick. "If he does, the big cuss will secure the fortune by hook or crook, and we'll be left to whistle for our supper."

"D'ye think he'll go to Nowhere, to-night?"

"No. He'll fight shy of there, for the present, I dare say, but will nevertheless be actively on the watch."

"Won't we run a risk in entering the town?"

"No. None of the enemy will be lurking around this late."

Parrimore's surmise was correct.

They visited the mining-camp, and made a visit to the different resorts, but Some Pumpkins was nowhere to be seen, nor were they in any way molested.

"You must remain here," Parrimore said, after they had inspected the register at the

hot-l. "The messenger, whoever he is, is undoubtedly keeping himself *incog*. It will be your business to study every stranger in the camp, and in that way learn who the messenger is. If Pumpkins reappears, look sharp! Disguise yourself, and do not for an instant lose sight of the giant. If you see him conversing with the messenger, send a bullet through his heart, and come at once for me. Remember, there's fat money for you, if we win!"

The villain went back to the hut, then.

An arrant coward at heart, he was afraid to expose himself, lest he should become a target for the pistol of his hated foe, General Stafford.

Several days passed, with but one incident to cause a commotion among the citizens of the camp.

Two nights in succession, the incoming stage had been halted by a band of masked road-agents, and the passengers and treasure-box robbed of everything of value.

Of course the crime was laid to Deadwood Dick, for no one in Nowhere, except those who chose to keep "mum," were aware of the fact that it was Pierre Parrimore who led the raid, backed as he was by Deadwood Dick's traitor band.

This was exactly what Parrimore wanted the people to believe—that Deadwood Dick was at the head of the road-agents; it would arouse them to greater indignation toward the famous ex-prince of the road.

Bird Black communicated regularly with the schemer, at the hut, but his reports had no news.

Nothing had been seen of Some Pumpkins; and there were so many strangers in camp, as to make it impossible to pick out the messenger.

Cathie, too, had been down to the hut, and told of her encounter, but brought no assurance that Daniel Stafford really was dead.

Thus it was that matters stood, when Pierre Parrimore received a note through the Nowhere post-office, which read thus:

"PIERRE PARRIMORE:—Commissioned by General Stafford to end the vendetta, I shall begin the work at once. DEADWOOD DICK!"

A startled expression shot athwart the villain's face as he tore the note into bits.

"Curse the fellow! I fear him more than a dozen Staffords. I must indeed be wary, lest the vendetta be ended by my own destruction."

He sat for an hour in a deep study, then with a fierce, triumphant expression upon his face, he left the hut, mounted his horse, and rode rapidly to Nowhere.

The camp wore its every-day appearance, as he dashed up the main street, but he had no eye for this commonplace fact.

He dismounted in front of *The Stuff* office, and drawing a revolver, fired six shots into the air.

That was as good as a column advertisement, for it drew a crowd of people around him at once, who were eager to know what was the "racket," and see the fun, if there was any to be seen.

Seeing the crowd, Parrimore vaulted into the saddle, and ran his eye over the sea of faces.

"Gentlemen!" he began, "I am a stranger to most of you, but I chance to have a bit of information that I presume you will all relish, as it vindicates the honor of one man while it criminales another. Is your sheriff present?"

Calvin Carter stepped forward.

"I'm that man!" he said.

"Good! A short time ago you had a condemned prisoner in your jail, whom you were to hang—Deadwood Dick?"

"Yas."

"Upon the day he was to hang, two men were registered at the hotel—Governor Snelling and a General Stafford?"

"Well?"

"Prior to the hanging, the Governor paid you a call, and got permission to visit the prisoner?"

"He did."

"Previous to his visit, General Stafford and his daughter had departed on the stage?"

"So I believe, sir."

"When the time came to hang the prisoner, you received an official notice from the Governor, granting a temporary respite, did you not?"

"I did."

"As a result, Deadwood Dick escaped."

"He did."

"Exactly. And you all loudly denounced the Governor as the prime cause."

"Cuss him, yes!"

"Well, my worthies, you denounced the wrong man!"

"What?"

A hundred voices seemed to utter the word, simultaneously.

"I say you denounced the wrong man," Parrimore repeated, triumphantly. "It was not General Stafford who went away on the stage, but Governor Snelling. It was not Governor Snelling who granted the respite, but General Stafford, and he, too, it was, who bought off Frank Fowler, and secured the liberation of the outlaw!"

A cry of astonishment and indignation went up.

"How do you know this?" Carter demanded.

"I know it—that's all. Stafford and I are bitter foes, and have sworn to kill each other. He knew he could not battle with me alone, and so, by releasing Deadwood Dick, he acquired a valuable ally. He and his daughter are now with Deadwood Dick, and are as much outlaws as the road-agent devil himself!"

"How about the order?" Carter demanded, keenly. "Your story don't hang well together?"

"You are wrong. Stafford and Snelling had been friends for years. As Snelling is too honorable a man to do anything treacherous, there can be no doubt but what Stafford helped himself to the gubernatorial paper and seal, in order to further his scheme, criminated himself by forging the chief magistrate's name. Snelling, noble fellow, bore the brunt of public denunciation in silence rather than that his friend should suffer for a criminal offense!"

The villain's harangue made a strong impression, and utterances of indignation were to be heard on every side.

"If this be true!" Cal Carter cried, the color leaping into his cheeks, "no pains shall be spared to hunt up the dastard, and mete out to him the punishment he justly deserves!"

"Right, you!" Parrimore cried. "Stafford, at this moment is not a dozen miles away, keeping in hiding, in fear of his life, and all we want is a general uprising of the people to hunt him out of his hole, and vindicate your Governor's honor. Hurrah! I say! Let every man put in his voice, and shout 'Death to Daniel G. Stafford!'"

And the lusty yell that went up fully indicated that the scheming scoundrel had scored a "ten strike."

CHAPTER XVI.

DICK TRIUMPHS AGAIN.

ABOUT the same hour that saw Pierre Parrimore in Nowhere, haranguing to the crowd, Cathie was to be seen in front of her cabin-home up the mountain, busily engaged at the wash-tub, while a line of clothes strung from the cabin to a neighboring tree, showed that she had already accomplished a good share of her task.

It was a warm, sunny day, and she preferred doing her work out of doors, where the birds sung in the tree-tops, and all Nature seemed smiling and happy.

Cathie, too, seemed in better spirits than usual, even though she now and then cast a sorrowful glance at the mound where rested all that remained of her erring brother Joe.

"Poor Joe!" she murmured. "Oh! that he could have lived and done better! Sometimes I have half a notion that we are not the children of Pierre Parrimore. Day by day he manifests more and more the disposition of the snake—the venomous and rancorous wretch. That is not my nature—far from it. At any rate, I cannot say I am sorry that General Stafford was not killed in that terrible leap."

She shuddered as she looked toward the cliff, and recalled the scene of a few nights before.

"If—if it should really turn out that he was my parent, oh! how could I ever forgive myself? But, bah! I do not believe a word of it. I do not believe a word of it. Parrimore may be a villain, but he did not lie when he rehearsed to me the story, over and over again, about the terrible vendetta, and how Joe and I were snatched from our home in infancy by Daniel Stafford. No! no! I am not a Stafford, but a Parrimore, and I did right in making our family foe take that leap from the cliff. Yet, it can hardly be otherwise than that he still lives."

"Young lady, you are wrong!"

It was a cool, pleasant voice that made the declaration—a voice Cathie recognized even before she wheeled, and saw perched composedly upon a rock a few yards away—Deadwood Dick!

Never did the dashing mountain rover look to better advantage. He was attired with scrupu-

lous neatness, and his face had more of its old boyish devil-may-care abandon of expression.

Not a day older scarcely did he look than when he had made famous the name of Deadwood Dick when Deadwood City was in the heyday of its glory.

A shade of pallor came over Cathie's face as she saw him, and her hand instinctively sought the revolver always in the belt about her waist.

His odd laugh, however, caused her to desist from touching the weapon.

"I wouldn't if I were you!" he said with that composure of tone that was, in its self a command. "We're not flipping the pasteboards just now, and there's no particular need of resorting to the tools. Should there be, I am quite handsomely prepared to furnish the music for the festival!"

"What brings you here?" she demanded. "You are an intruder upon these premises, sir, and I command you to depart."

"Indeed! I have no idea of doing anything of the sort just yet, Miss Stafford. If I had, in all probability, I should not have come. You see, I just came down to have a little chat with you."

"I do not know you, sir. Again I command you to go!"

"And again I as politely refuse. You say you do not know me. I was of the impression that we had an introduction to each other the other night at Missouri Mag's."

"Sir, I do not care to talk with you. We are enemies, and if you do not leave I shall go in the cabin and shut the door."

Dick laughed.

"That's all utter nonsense!" he assented. "I'll bet ten dollars to a cent you can't move a muscle, except at my will!"

The pallor had returned to Cathie's cheeks. Her features, too, had assumed a sort of rigidity of expression.

"You'll give in that I've got you, eh?" he demanded, grimly.

"Yes!" was the submissive answer.

"That's right. You begin to act sensibly. If I were to command you to go and leap from yonder cliff, as you forced General Stafford to do, you would do so, would you not?"

For a second there was a convulsive working of her features, as if she were struggling fiercely to break the spell that bound her; then her features gradually tempered down to repose, and she said, faintly:

"Yes!"

An expression of triumph flitted across Deadwood Dick's face.

"Then go and take the leap!" he thundered.

She turned mechanically, and walked straight toward the cliff.

"My power over her surprises even myself!" Dick muttered. "She would walk on to destruction, did I not prevent her. Halt!" he added, in a sharp tone. "Come back!"

She halted, turned around, and walked back to the precise spot she had started from.

"You are an apt pupil," Dick laughed. "You were just going to walk into the jaws of death. Why did you make General Stafford leap over that cliff?"

"Because he was my father's enemy!"

"Did he not tell you that he was your father?"

"Yes."

"You wouldn't believe him?"

"No!"

"If I were to assure you that General Stafford is really your father, would you believe me?"

"Yes."

"You only think so. If I were to give you your freedom, you would not say so."

"I would!"

"I'll try you then, and see!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, ere she gave a violent start, and the color of health rushed back into her cheek.

"There. Now, what have you to say for yourself?" he asked, coolly.

"I—I don't know!" she replied, confusedly.

"All seems strange."

"Do you remember anything you have just passed through?"

"I—I remember of saying I believed you, when you said General Stafford was my father."

"Do you still believe me?"

"I do. You are a strange man, but somehow, I am sure you are a truthful one. Where is General Stafford?"

"But a few miles away. You want to see him?"

"Yes, yes!"

"You cannot, yet. You must come with me. The vendetta is not yet ended!"

"Where do you want me to go?"

"Wherever I go I have sworn to end the vendetta. If I fall, you must take my place."

"Against Pierre Parrimore?"

"Yes."

She looked undecided.

He caught her arm, and pointed to the lone mound near the flower-beds.

"You see that?" he said. "Pierre Parrimore caused his death!"

She grew white, but a terrible glitter entered her eyes.

"Can you prove it?" she gasped.

"Yes. Can you bear the proof, even though it bring to you a worse agony?"

Whiter and more rigid grew her features.

"Yes!" she breathed, with an effort. "You refer to my husband and child?"

"I do! Are you strong—will you bear the worst, for vengeance' sake?"

"I will. Lead on!"

She spoke with a stern resolution, that he knew would not fail her.

"Then, come!" he said. "I will not only prove to you who killed your brother, but enough so that you can have no doubts as to who is your father!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VICTIMS.

SHE went into the cabin, put on her hat, and came out, armed with her handsome rifle.

"I am ready!" she said. "Have we far to go?"

"Not a great ways!" he replied, briefly.

They started, without further delay.

They did not go down the mountain-side, but skirted along it, gradually ascending. The route was rough, tortuous and dangerous, and locomotion extremely difficult; but at the end of an hour, they had reached a sort of dent in the mountain-side, overshadowed by a great ledge.

Here a sight met the gaze of poor Cathie, that wrung a shriek of agony and horror from her lips.

At their feet lay the mangled remains of an infant, the better share of whose body had been devoured by the wolves.

Near by, lay a man, a handsome fellow of about Dick's own age, with light hair and mustache, and an open, kindly chiseled face.

He was not dead, but death would have been a welcome visitor to him, for the flesh had been entirely torn off of his lower limbs, while his body was untouched.

Near by, thongs clinging to a tree, told the reason why. He had been bound to the tree, but so high up, that the ravenous beasts could not reach beyond a certain height.

There was an expression of terrible agony upon the sufferer's face, but he was still conscious.

"Oh! Ford! Ford! my poor husband!" Cathie shrieked, springing to his side. "Oh! merciful God, my child—my husband!"

And she burst into a paroxysm of piteous, heart-rendering screams and sobs, such as would have affected a heart of stone.

"Don't, Cathie!" Ford Favor said, speaking with an effort. "Do not give away to grief, at such a time as this. Thank a merciful God that we are granted this meeting ere I die, through yonder gentleman's kindness. Be calm, my little one, for I must say what I have to say, quickly. I prayed that I might live to meet you again, on earth."

"Yes, Mrs. Favor, I beg of you be calm," Deadwood Dick said, kneeling beside her, and laying his hand upon her shoulder, while tears he was powerless to restrain, coursed down his cheeks. "Be calm, for grief cannot mend matters, now. I found your husband here, this morning, where, with your babe, he was left by Pierre Parrimore and Black Bird. I drove off the wolves. Your husband requested me to come for you, and I did so, although it wrung my heart to fetch you to so sad a scene. So, be brave, I beg of you!"

Finally with an effort, Cathie conquered her grief somewhat—enough so that she was able to hear Ford Favor's last utterances, before his spirit took its flight to that unexplored bourne, whence none returneth.

"They took me by surprise—Pierre and Black Bird," he explained, "and brought me here. Pierre assured me that I should die here, and so I will. He said you were a rich prize for him, and I and our babe were in the way. When they left me, they told me they were going to kill Joe, and our friend here, has told me, that they did so. Cathie, you are not Parrimore's child, for he told me so, thinking to mock my misery. They left me here to die.

Our babe died of starvation, yesterday, and therefore suffered nothing from the attack of the wolves. As for myself, I have suffered, but what of that? I see a clear way, ahead of me, darling, and will meet you—over—there. I—"

He ceased to speak, and his face grew whiter and rigid.

Cathie, with her face buried in her hands, understood the silence; she uttered a piercing shriek, and sunk back, in a dead swoon.

With bowed head, Deadwood Dick remained silent, for a few minutes—praying, perhaps—then, he set to work, to perform what remained to be done.

After extraordinary exertions, he succeeded in restoring Cathie to consciousness, and reducing her grief to a state of comparative quiet.

He then prepared a temporary grave near at hand, and there buried all that was earthly of Ford Favor and the babe, until such a time as a more befitting tomb could be provided.

Cathie watched him, with a face as white as marble, and eyes that gleamed with a wild, unnatural light.

When the work was finally completed, she picked up her rifle, and went and knelt by the humble grave.

There she remained for several minutes. She had ceased to weep, and a stony calmness of demeanor had taken possession of her.

Finally, she arose, and turned to Deadwood Dick, saying:

"I am deeply indebted to you, sir. Not a doubt exists in my mind, now, but what General Stafford is my father, and but for you and him I would now be friendless. Come! I am ready to go. The trail lies plain before me, and I will follow it. You can accompany me if you like!"

"You speak of the trail of vengeance?" Dick said, interrogatively.

"I do. Triple cause have I to seek vengeance, aside from that of the vendetta. Pierre Parrimore and his pard shall not see the light of this world twenty-four hours longer. I have registered an oath to that. Come! We will surprise the wolf in his lair!"

They accordingly left the scene of Ford Favor's tragic death, and descended the mountain-side.

Half-way down, they halted.

They had suddenly stumbled on a sight that was peculiarly interesting.

Upon a slight plateau, were three familiar figures, taking part in a strange scene.

Two of the figures were of the whisky-absorbing firm of Soaker and O'Gall.

These two were seated upon a log, and each one held a pair of cocked revolvers in their grasp.

Lying at their feet, under the menace of the weapons, was the giant from Canaan, Some Pumpkins.

The bummers had got the giant "dead to rights," so to speak; but with what object?

"Humph! here's a go!" Dick said, in a low tone. "I reckon we shall have to walk into this matinee; come!"

They walked forward, with weapons drawn and ready for use.

Soaker and O'Gall made no move to remove their "drop" on the giant, however.

"Hello, here!" Dick cried. "What's your racket, my three canary birds?"

"Hello, yerself!" Sis Soaker responded. "It never rains but it pours, an' this hyer water-spout aire ther luckiest thing yet. You're Deadwood Dick, ain't you?"

"I am."

"Then allow me—we aire Soaker and O'Gall, gents of all trades—not jacks, please distinctly understand *that*. And you're the very galoot we want to see, aire you? I hev a question to propound!"

"We have a question to propound," corrected O'Gall.

"Yes, of course—we."

"Well, propound it!" Dick ordered. "I am like the mule—all ears."

"Good joke! Ha, ha!—very good! You see, my dear sir, we are two gentlemen of leisure, ostensibly; but *ad interim*, in reality, we are Government inspectors of wines and liquors. The avocation not proving properly compensatory, we concluded to add another profession—namely, detectivism. This is our first case."

"A fine-looking case, I'll agree," Dick laughed. "But, go on."

"Well, my dear sir, the question is this: Before us we have a valuable case, which indirectly concerns you. Are you willing to pay for such valuable information as we can diffuse, or shall we quiet our own individual scruples,

and gobble up the whole potent dose of swill to the enrichment of our own pockets?"

"That depends, my worthy friend. If you have any important information for me, I will pay for it [according to its value—after I hear it."

"That won't work. We're working for col-lat, and col-lat we'll have, ef we have to turn this prisoner over to Pierre Parrimore!"

"Ah!"

"You bet! Pierre Parrimore would show a flush band for this chap, an' he's worth every cent as much to you."

"I fail to see how!"

"'Ca'se you're in snucks wi' one General Stafford, an' this hyer giant would give a heap to git away, 'ca'se he hes a 'portant secret, worth swads o' money to one o' the ginerals darters!"

"What kind of a game are you trying to trump up now, you miserable bum? If you have got anything important for me to know, out with it at once, or I'll blow your head off!"

"Blow and be hanged. Make us an offer, an' ef it is fair, we'll onload. Otherwise, we deal wi' Pierre Parrimore!"

"Humph! how much will the information be worth?"

"To Estelle B. Stafford, one hundred thousand dollars!"

"What's your price?"

"A year's every-day drunk apiece. At present, it takes ten dollars a day, each, to keep us comfortable and snug. Ten times three hundred and sixty-five is three thousand, six hundred and fifty dollars. That sum two times is seven thousand, three hundred. That's our price!"

"I object, Misther Soaker—I object," spoke up O'Gall. "Yez forget soomthin'. Six months hence, tha whisky will not be havin' tha same effect as now, an' tin dollars a day will not do us—not kape us even sinseless!"

"You're a hog!" Soaker growled. "Hang yer stupidity, won't our face be equal to the emergency? Waal, I should croak!"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Deadwood Dick, seven thousand, three hundred will let you plum inter our confidence!"

"Dirt cheap!" Dick said, reaching into an inner pocket, and taking out a wallet which contained a large sum of counterfeit money, which he had captured during a raid, several months before. "To make even change, I'll give you four thousand apiece. Here you are!"

The bummers received the money with delight, and not waiting to examine into its actual worth, shoved it down into their pockets.

"Now, then, unburden yourselves," Dick said, "and be quick about it."

Soaker did so. He related how McClurg, *alias* Parrimore, had sought to hire them, and how, later, they had entered his employ to learn whatever fell in their way. After leaving the hut in the ravine, the night of Deadwood Dick's escape from Missouri Mag's, they had pried around, played eavesdropper, and overheard all that was said in the hut.

The substance of this they related to Dick; also how they had captured the giant, and his refusal to speak the word by which the money-bearing messenger from the South was to make himself known!

"That ain't all!" Soaker continued. "We just come up from the town, and there's the deuce to pay down there, and loads of it!"

He then told of Pierre Parrimore's coming to Nowhere, and how he had aroused the people to arms, by narrating General Stafford's trick to release Deadwood Dick.

"Ther town is in a boiling commotion," Soaker added, "an' parties are being organized and equipped to scour the neighboring country fer you and the general!"

"Let 'em scour," Dick said, grimly. "When our mission is accomplished we'll bid them find us, if they can."

"Will there not be danger of their discovering my father and sister, even before we can accomplish our mission?" Cathie asked, anxiously.

"Perhaps. We will see to that, directly. In regard to this fortune business, I have already marked the man who I am satisfied is the messenger. I will find out of Some Pumpkins, here, the word; then he must be held a prisoner until the thing is settled."

"Haow d'ye know you'll find out the word?" the giant demanded, speaking up, for the first.

"I ain't sech a fool as to give it up."

"I will see!" Dick replied, calmly, throwing the full force of his magnetic gaze upon the big man. "Ha! I fancy you are already mine. Tell me! Are you feeling well?"

"Quite well, thank you."

"So? Why some one is tickling your feet!" Instantly the giant began to wriggle and kick, while he roared with laughter, until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Stop! stop!" he yelled. "Oh! cracky—oh—oh!"

"Will you tell me the word?" Dick demanded, smiling.

"Yes! yes. Stop! stop!"

"There! now you feel all right, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Then what is the word?"

"It is 'Old-Hundred.'"

"Look out! are you lying to me?"

"No! no! I hope you may cut my throat, if I am."

"Very well. You lie still. Soaker, bind his hands!"

The giant remained quiet until bound; then at a wave of Dick's hand, he came out of the spell.

"You see I obtained the word!" Dick said, as the big man began to struggle and swear.

"Ye lie!" he roared. "What was it?"

"'Old-Hundred!'"

A baffled oath from the ruffian convinced Dick that he was in possession of the correct word.

He then turned to Soaker and O'Gall.

"You two fellows remain here, and guard the giant. You shall be well paid for it. There is little danger that the search will extend to this point. If it does, why, scoot. Can I depend on you?"

"We aire yours truly," Soaker said graciously. "Hurry back, tho', fer we're anxious to start on the year's jamboree."

"All right," and turning, the deliverer and Cathie took their departure.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MESSENGER.

Dick and Cathie went directly to the cabin, in the mountain pocket, and there took place a joyful meeting, between the general and his long lost daughter, and as well, between the two sisters.

The general, of course, took a father's delight in forgiving Cathie—or Bijou, that being her real name—for considering that she was so terribly in earnest, in believing herself a Parrimore; he was proud of her "blooded" spirit, as he termed it.

Allowing them time for the first fond greetings, Deadwood Dick then said:

"It will now be necessary for you to leave this place, and seek one that is far safer," and he related what he had learned from Sis Soaker.

The general looked surprised and apprehensive.

His sore hip, was by no means healed, yet, and the prospect to him, looked anything but pleasant.

"Where shall we go? What can we do? If I were well, and it were not for my daughters, matters would not look so bad!"

"One of your daughters will be no incumbrance to you!" Cathie spoke up. "I shall accompany Deadwood Dick until with the death of Pierre Parrimore the vendetta is ended."

"Everything can be satisfactorily arranged, I think," Dick said. "By starting at once, we can reach Top-Knot camp, ten miles away, in time to catch the stage, which will take you to St. Julien. There you will be safe to remain until we join you."

"But how will I be able to travel?" the general asked, dubiously.

"That can be easily arranged," Dick replied.

"I have a horse, not far away, and can fix you out so comfortably, that you will not mind the journey. As for the rest of us, we can walk. You all remain here, now, until I return with the horse."

He left the cabin, and hurried away out of the pocket at a rapid gait.

Cathie watched him from the doorway of the cabin until he had disappeared, with an anxious expression.

"What is it, that tells me he is going into great danger?" she murmured. "If he does not soon return I shall go in search of him."

As for Deadwood Dick, he little anticipated any danger, and strode briskly along, without exercising the usual caution that marked his movements.

In the course of a quarter of an hour he reached a small glade, surrounded by chaparral, and here a fine-looking horse was contentedly grazing.

Drawing saddle and other rappings from under a ledge, Dick quickly equipped the animal, and was about to mount him, when the ominous click! click! of several weapons, caused him to look quickly around.

There, standing not ten paces away, and covering him with the aim of six revolvers, were the identical three men he had left on the mountain—Soaker, O'Gall, and Some Pumpkins!

"Hol hol!" the giant roared in great glee. "Who hes got ther drap, now, me noble duke? How der yer feel about this time o' P. M."

Dick's face flushed with anger.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, addressing Soaker. "I left you to guard this overgrown brute, and here you've turned traitor!"

"Bet yer boots we hev!" Soaker answered, unblushingly. "We ain't no eejotts, ef we do put away a fair 'lowance o' tangletut!"

"Nayther we aire!" coincided O'Gall.

"You see," continued Soaker, "our friend heer, suggested ye were a fat mutton, an' bein' as ye treated us skinny, ef we'd jine issues with him, thar'd be fun ahead, an' money, too. So, heer we aire, an' you aire our prisoner, and the Staffords will be, too, afore long!"

"You're not sure I am your prisoner, yet," Dick replied. "Besides, what have I done to you, to merit this treachery?"

"Hey! Listen to that, will ye? Didn't ye give us seven thousan'—no, eight thousan' dollars, to git drunk on, an' warn't it all counterfeited? Oh! thar's nothin' slouchy about us. Ye'r our prisoner, an' arter we git ther Staffords, we'll make a dicker fer good cash, wi' Pierre Parrimore, an' the Nowhere Vigilantes. So, ef you value your own skin, surrender! We've got the drap on ye, and we mean bizness!"

"You bet we do!" assented Some Pumpkins.

"Av coourse we do!" chimed in the great and only Gilderoy O'Gall.

"What if I refuse to surrender?" Dick demanded, with a view to prolonging the parley—for his quick gaze had detected something, which gave him hope that help was near at hand.

Behind the ruffians was a gigantic boulder, and Dick had seen something very decidedly like a man's head, beyond it.

"What'll we do, ef ye don't surrender?" repeated Some Pumpkins. "Why, we'll fill ye so full o' plumbago that ye can't navigate, an' then hang ye up by the heels to bleed, while we go an' fetch the Vigilantes down upon ye—you hear me! Spit 'er out!—will ye surrender, or no?—fer we'd jest as lief blaze away at you, as not!"

Dick had little doubt but what he spoke the truth.

Before he could give answer however, a man stepped quickly from behind the boulder, revolver in hand, and cried:

"Throw up your hands, you wretches, or die in your tracks!"

The challenge came so unexpectedly that the trio wheeled about in a rage, uttering oaths that will not bear repetition here; and taking advantage of the opportunity, Deadwood Dick drew his own weapons, and strode forward.

"Yes, my worthies!" he cried. "You had better surrender yourselves, I take it. Throw down your weapons and give in peaceably, or you die with your boots on!"

Soaker and O'Gall uttered defiant yells, and bounded suddenly away, bent on escape.

If they had calculated to escape, however, they reckoned wrongly, for two pistol-shots rung out, and with yells of pain both threw up their hands and fell headlong to the ground.

Without paying further attention to them Dick turned to the stranger, who still "covered" Some Pumpkins.

"You are St. George Atwood?" Dick said, interrogatively—"the fellow whom Fakir Fred rescued in Missouri Mag's saloon?"

"I am; and if I mistake not, you are Fakir Fred."

"I am. I little thought, however, you would ever have a chance to serve me. You are the man who came from the South as messenger, bearing money to Estella B. Stafford?"

Atwood started.

"How do you know?" he demanded, suspiciously.

"Enough. A scheme has been on foot to relieve you of the money, but fortunately it is balked. The Stafford family are now under my protection, and your 'Old-Hundred' can be flung at me instead of the treacherous wretch you cover with your weapon. I will conduct you to

Miss Stafford, and you can complete your business with her."

"Which I shall be heartily glad to do," Atwood declared. "The sooner I get out of this country the better pleased I will be. I found out this giant was a villain, as soon as I arrived in Nowhere and met him. Accordingly, after the trouble in the saloon I kept shady and shadowed him, in hopes of thus being able to find the party to whom the fortune belongs. What do you propose to do with the big brute?"

All of Atwood's dudeish mannerisms, except for his dress, had now disappeared, and he had the bearing of a sensible young fellow.

Dick did not answer the question immediately, but surveyed the giant keenly.

He was really puzzled as to what disposal was best to make of him.

"Ye'd better let me go!" Some Pumpkins suggested. "The puddin's in the fire now, anyhow, an' I can't do ye any further harm."

"You're not to be trusted," Dick said. "I guess the most sensible thing that we can do will be to take you along with us. Let me bind your arms."

Seeing nothing else to do, the giant once more submitted to being made a prisoner; then, Dick leading his horse, the trio set out for the cabin in the pocket, which they reached without further incident.

Here St. George Atwood delivered up to Stella a draft for her fortune, and the noble-hearted girl expressed her intention of sharing her good luck equally with her father and sister.

Preparations were then made to depart for Top-Knot, and the party were soon *en route*.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN INFAMOUS SCHEME.

SIS SOAKER had not lied when he said that Pierre Parrimore had created a general uprising of the citizens of Nowhere.

His recital of General Stafford's trick to secure the liberty of the Prince of the Road caused the people in general great indignation—and, perhaps justly, too, for it certainly was rather a shabby act, on the part of Stafford, toward his friend, the Governor.

Once he had ignited the first spark of the fire, Pierre Parrimore was not the man to let it die out. He literally added fuel to it, until the flame grew too strong to quell.

His proposal to organize parties of men, and send them out in all directions in search of the general and Deadwood Dick, was greeted with hearty applause, and when he heralded the news that he, personally, would give five thousand dollars apiece for the two fugitives' heads, the rough men of that even rougher mining-camp, were set fairly wild, and Parrimore was without doubt the man of the day.

Inside of two hours, all work was suspended, in and about the camp, and the citizens, thereof, irrespective of rank or position, were organized and fairly well equipped for the work in hand—the work of bounding down to death, Deadwood Dick and General Stafford. They seemed to regard it as a matter of duty to themselves, and justice, to seek and kill the two fugitives.

When all was in readiness for a temporary evacuation of the camp, Parrimore took it upon himself to again become orator of the day.

"There is one fact, that I have suppressed from you, until this minute," he announced, "because I wished the movement to get fully under way. I know exactly where the stronghold of Deadwood Dick's road-agents is located, and propose to have the honor of capturing it. To do this, I shall require ten able-bodied fellows, whom I will select to suit myself. More than ten will be unnecessary, and in the way, where ten can do the work we'll. Now, Deadwood Dick and General Stafford are not at this stronghold, as I have learned by personal reconnaissance, but are hiding in the mountains, fearing to show themselves, knowing I am on their track. Therefore, after I select my party, the other divisions are to scour the country in various directions, in search of the two fugitives. Immediately after capturing the main band, I will bring them here, and leaving Black Bird and my men to do guard duty over them, I will join one of your parties, and take active part in the search!"

"You should have been a commander in the late rebellion!" complimented Colonel Ezra Crocker, the owner of the Crocker Mine, "as I perceive you are a born warrior. But, are you

certain that ten men will do you? Hadn't you better take more?"

"Oh! no. You see, I know just how the capture will have to be effected, and I can handle ten men in those quarters far better than I can more. I lead my party directly north from here and all other parties must shape their route in different directions, lest they scare away my game. I will start half an hour in advance of the rest of you, so that I will be well toward my destination ere any of you have started. Remember! my offer holds good to whoever fires the shot that puts out the light of Deadwood Dick's candle, or that of Daniel Stafford."

Parrimore then selected Black Bird and nine other men from the crowd, and they rode away out of the camp.

It was a noticeable fact that every man he selected was a typical ruffian, fit for any evil work; but in the excitement of the moment, little attention, if any, was paid to the matter.

Pierre Parrimore and Black Bird rode at the head of their party, several yards in advance.

Bird's face had rather an ill-humored expression upon it, and there was a treacherous glitter in his eyes.

Parrimore noticed the fact readily enough.

"What's wrong?" he demanded, grimly.

"Enough," the other ruffian growled.

"Things are getting pretty near a focus, and I haven't seen ye shell out any o' the filthy. I sha'n't wait many hours longer!"

"Nor will you have to. Before sunset to-night, I'll place ten thousand dollars in your hands."

"Bah! I'm cussed if I believe you've got ten dollars to your name."

"Sh!" and the arch-villain glanced apprehensively back at the other men. "Maybe you're right, my boy—but listen! Independent of the girl's fortune, I'll place the sum I named in your hands by sunset if you stick by me!"

"How ye goin' to do it?" Black Bird demanded, still suspicious and doubtful. "Don't think ve'r pickin' Black Bird up fer a fool, Pierre Parrimore!"

"Did I mention such a thing? No! D'ye know what I'm goin' to do?"

"How should I?"

"Well, spur up a little, and I'll tell you."

They soon were so far ahead that there was no dagger of their being overheard.

Then Pierre Parrimore said:

"I'll now unfold to you my plan. I gave you credit of suspecting that I was playing a game to win to-day, and so I am. When the other searchers leave Nowhere, what condition is the camp left in? There'll not be a dozen people left to protect it! Yet, within the precincts of that very camp there's money enough to set us up independent for a dozen lifetimes, ain't there?"

"Correct! Go on!"

"Well, here goes. Before we git to the stronghold we halt, and you remain behind with the gang. I go on to the stronghold, ostensibly to reconnoiter, but in reality to git the boys. We return, creep up on you, and shoot down every mother's son of you—except yourself, of course. Then we go on to Nowhere, sack the town and take all the money we can get hold of. There I leave you, and each man shifts for himself. There's not the shadow of a doubt but what the other searchers will end the vendetta for me; anyhow, they shall find me badly wounded, which will, of course, prove me loyal to their cause; and if you like you can play the same racket, and we'll work together for the hundred thousand."

"That all sounds very pretty," Black Bird said—"except one particular. Supposing you should make a mistake, and shoot me when ye cut down the others? It won't work, for a cent!"

"Bah! I was never that false. If you like, we will capture such of the gang as will surrender, and shoot the others. At any rate, I give my word of honor you shall not be hurt."

"Well, go ahead with your dance. I'll look out and be ready to pop you if a bullet stings me!"

They rode on.

It was nearly sunset when they neared the outlaw stronghold.

Then, in a little chaparral-surrounded glade, they came to a halt, and after a few explanations, Parrimore went ahead—to reconnoiter, he told his unsuspecting dupes.

Had they known his real intention, he would not have lived five minutes more of his sinful life.

He went direct to the stronghold, an old cabin in a neighboring ravine.

Here, to the road-agents, he outlined the proposed attack, and painted a vivid picture of the immense haul in store for them.

After a little consideration the masked band consented to become parties to the scheme, and in ten minutes were mounted and *en route*.

Arriving near the glade they dismounted and crept in upon the victims of Parrimore's plot, and took them wholly by surprise.

A bitter fight, however, ensued, in which Parrimore did not expose himself.

Five of the miners were shot down, and four captured and bound to trees.

Black Bird was not molested.

Then, with Parrimore's order, all of the road-agents mounted, and with the two arch villains at their head, dashed away toward Nowhere.

All except one road-agent, who, unknown to the main party, had managed to remain behind.

CHAPTER XX.

THE VENDETTA ENDED.

To explain who the road-agent was, who had remained behind, it will be necessary to make a slight retrogression.

The trip of the Staffords, to Top-Knot, under Deadwood Dick's able guidance, was accomplished without any incident, and Dick and Cathie saw the general, Stella and Atwood safely aboard the stage, bound for St. Julien.

Some Pumpkins had been left bound, near the camp, where he might eventually be found, and released.

After the departure of the stage, Dick and his fair companion left Top-Knot, and rode rapidly away, Dick having purchased Cathie a horse.

"Where do we go, now?" she asked.

"Direct to the outlaw stronghold!" he replied, briefly.

As he did not volunteer further information, she did not press him for it.

After two hours' rapid riding they reached the ravine, and soon commanded a view of the stronghold.

Bidding Cathie remain behind, Deadwood Dick went ahead, and soon disappeared.

It was half an hour, ere he reappeared, shortly after which two masked men came up.

"These two fellows are the only two loyal men left of my band," Dick said. "Parrimore is expected, to-night, and we are to take these fellows' places in the gang, until he comes, and our mission is ended. These gents are about to desert, anyhow!"

The two men disappeared in the trees, and in due time returned in entirely different disguises. Their former road-agent attire and accouterments they surrendered to Dick, receiving in exchange the horses Dick and Cathie had ridden; then they departed.

Dick and Cathie put on the road-agents' garments over their own.

One of the men—a mere boy in years—fortunately had been about Cathie's height, and his clothes fitted her nicely, and a false beard, supplied by Dick, fixed her out beyond recognition.

When their arrangements were all complete, Dick gave her such instructions as she might need, and then they advanced boldly toward the cabin.

As they entered, Dick nodded, and said "all clear" to the guard, and they went and threw themselves upon benches, a string of which ran around the interior of the great room, and no particular attention was paid to them by the thirty-odd occupants of the den.

They had not been there long, when Pierre Parrimore arrived and unfolded his plot.

"We go with them," Dick whispered. "When the attack is made, watch good your chance, and escape. When we go on, you ride like wild-fire to the vicinity of the cliff, where your brother is buried. Get some of the citizens together, and fetch them cautiously to the vicinity of Nowhere! I'll meet 'em, and lead 'em on!"

Consequently, the road-agent who had been left behind was Cathie.

When the hoof-strokes of the road-agent party had died out, Cathie hastened into the glade, and related to the prisoners Pierre Parrimore's plot.

As they consented to join in the attack upon the road-agents, she released them, and bade them hasten to the vicinity of Nowhere.

She then mounted her horse and sped away, for she was a skilled equestrian.

Better luck than she had anticipated greeted

her, for it was not long ere she met two of the bands of searchers, and a third was soon added.

Then they set out for the mining-camp.

It was dark ere they reached a point as near as they dared approach without reconnoissance.

Here a halt was made, and they were directly joined by a horseman.

"Gentlemen," he said, "has my friend made known to you who I am?"

"No!" Colonel Ezra Crocker replied. "She has, however, explained the situation."

"Enough. The road-agents of Pierre Parrimore are now robbing the camp. The bank has not yet been touched. If you desire to put yourselves under my command, I will lead the attack!"

"Certainly we will. But who are you?"

"I am one who strikes for vengeance to-night—Deadwood Dick! We are friends for this occasion. If after we sweep those detestable villains from the town, you desire my surrender, I will do so."

"Not if I have anything to say about it," the colonel cried, while the men heartily echoed his sentiments.

Dick then made a final reconnoissance, and reported the road-agents battering down the door of the bank.

"Come! Now is our time," he cried, and waving his hat in the air, he led the attack.

The road-agents being unhorsed, were taken wholly by surprise, and few if any escaped, the majority being ruthlessly and mercilessly shot down.

It was an easily-won victory, and when the last pistol-shot had been fired, the victorious party made the night ring with a shout—one, too, strange to issue from their lips:

"Hurrah! hurrah for Deadwood Dick, as square a man as ever met a foe!"

When the dead and wounded were gathered, Dick and Cathie found to their regret that Pierre Parrimore was not among the number.

"The vendetta is not yet ended," Dick said. "Will you pursue the villain further, Miss Stafford?"

"Yes. You remember I have a twofold vengeance to wreak on that monster."

"Then I cannot leave you to pursue your object alone, and perhaps fall into Parrimore's clutches. We had best wait till daybreak."

Accordingly, they did so.

In the morning, as they were preparing to depart, Colonel Crocker approached them.

"Another victim was found, awhile ago," he said, "but he has just died. He left a death message for you."

"What? who was he?"

"Bird Black. He said—tell you that you can easily find Parrimore. He is badly wounded in several places, and could not have done otherwise than leave a trail of blood behind him. He it was who gave Bird his death wound!"

"The wretch!" Dick exclaimed. "Villain though I knew him to be, I did not think him brutal enough to kill his own emissary."

They took their departure.

A search was made, and they indeed soon struck a trail of blood.

To follow it up, was no hard task.

When noonday came, they reached a lonely spot in the mountains, where lay Pierre Parrimore, dying.

"Spare me! spare me, I pray!" he moaned, as they approached.

"Spare you?" Cathie cried, the light of undying hatred burning in her eyes.

"Did you spare my brother? Did you spare my husband—my child, you inhuman wretch—you hyena?"

She laid her hand upon a revolver, but Dick prevented her from drawing it.

"Don't!" he said. "The vendetta is ended."

Pierre Parrimore had sunk back, dead!

Wretch though he was, Dick buried his remains; then he conducted Cathie to St. Julien, and restored her to her father and sister.

The three, thus united, afterward went to California, and there Deadwood Dick lost track of them.

Sis Soaker and Gilderoy O'Gall were not killed, but afterward had many a good drunk together.

As for Deadwood Dick, he is still in Nevada, where, as usual, he has fallen into a series of adventures, which may constrain us to again recur to the lion-hearted ex-knight of the road.

THE END.



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